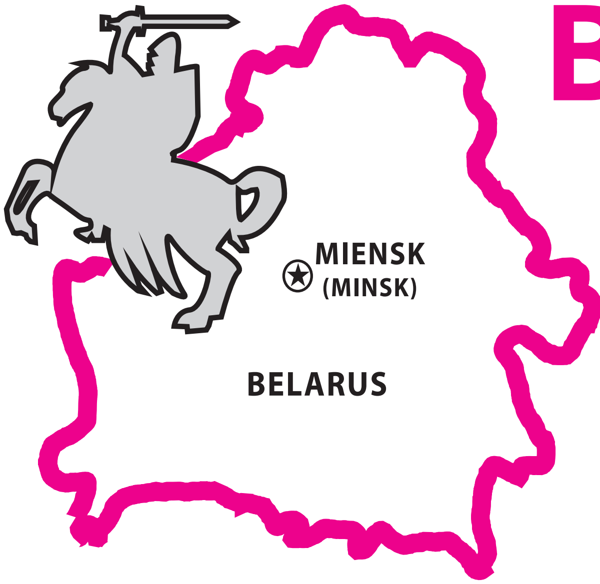
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EDITORIAL

PREDICTABLE ELECTION IN THE SHADOW OF THE NOBEL PRIZE

KIRYL KASCIAN

One could expected that the Fall 2015 in Belarus would be politically intensive and dynamic. However, it passed quite peacefully and without significant upheavals. The fifths presidential election was held on October 11, 2015. It ended up with another re--election of Lukashenka. According to the official results announced by the Central Electoral Commission, Aliaksandr Lukashenka won the election with 83.47% of the vote, which is the highest percentage he ever acquired. The election itself is regarded as mockery as there were no real opponents to the current political regime.

Belarusian political analyst Pavel Usau argues that the so-called alternative candidates have actually contributed to another Lukashenka's re-election, as they could not take the role of any real alternative to the existing authorities. Therefore, their main task was to assume the role of virtual alternative to the regime. However, this role was not supported by the majority of the country's population.

Before the election the the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS) registered in Lithuania published its opinion poll according to which 45.7% were ready to support Lukashenka, followed by Tacciana Karatkevich – 17.9%, Siarhiei Haidukevich – 11.4% and Mikalai Ulakhovich – 3.6% (closed survey). These figures seem to be at least far-fetched because none of the candidates could effectively appeal to the larger protest or undecided segments of the Belarusian society. Hence, while Haidukevich and Ulakhovich could be assessed as Lukashenka's trial horses, the personality of Karatkevich requires more attention.

Being the first ever women registered as a candidate, she did not become a representative of the united opposition. Moreover, in the society where the contents of electoral programmes play secondary role, she was incapable to attract significant portions of anti-Lukashenka or undecided electorate due to lack of personal charisma. In one of her interviews the chairwomen of the Belarusian Central Electoral Commission Lidziya Yarmoshyna concluded:

> I believe that the phenomenon of Ms. Karatkevich was backed by the supporters of infantilism. Young citizens were ready to give the [presidential] post to a person from nowhere, just because she was a new face. Thus, I believe that the vote "against all" is the vote of mature, but disappointed people [according to the official results this option with 6.32% was the second most popular choice of the electorate – BR]. And the vote for a little-known candidates is the infantile one.

Despite its rather offensive nature, this comment by Ms. Yarmoshyna demonstrates two important problems of the Belarusian political spectrum. First, the current Belarusian opposition lacks the personalities who could effectively mobilize protest or undecided electorate and thus become real opponents of Lukashenka. Second, the Belarusian officials indirectly acknowledge that at the current stage the votes against all apparently combined with the boycott option put more troubles to the regime than the votes for the alternative candidates.

Thus, the lack of real alternative ensured Lukashenka his another victory with the highest ever percentage of support. However the election were assessed as inconsistent with the international standards for democratic elections. Hence, in its preliminary report the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights underlined the need for the "comprehensive reform process" in Belarus. Nonetheless, some positive aspects were noted, including peaceful nature of the electoral campaign both prior and on the election day. The protest gathered around 300 people. It did not last long and caused no unrest.

The release of the political prisoners already in August 2015 could be regarded as a pragmatic step of the Belarusian authorities, aimed at the creation of positive image of the electoral campaign in the West. This step was an attempt to get the Western sanctions against the chairpersons of the Belarusian regime lifted or even to get legitimized as a result of the election's assessment. This plan partly worked since the European Union and the United States have temporarily lifted some sanctions against the official Minsk.

In addition to the political prisoners' issue, Lukashenka managed to successfully play the stability card both domestically and internationally. On the one hand, he performed the impartial host's role in the resolution of the conflict between Ukraine and

Russia. This process brought two key political figures of the EU politics – Angela Merkel and François Hollande – in August in Minsk to the event hosted by the person whose name was in the sanctions list of the European Union. On the other hand, Lukashenka tried to appeal to the Belarusian people convincing them that his stay in power will ensure peaceful development of Belarus in contrast to the neighboring Ukraine. Thus, Lukashenka used the war which is regarded as the worst fear of the Belarusian population. Thus, the next five years of Lukashenka's rule can be seen as a continuation of his policies with special emphasis on the issues of stability and security, used both in the domestic and international rhetoric of the regime. Moreover, while playing these cards within the context of the present *status quo* in the region, the Belarusian authorities might try to seek closer rapprochement with the EU at least in the economic sphere, including sectoral and regional cooperation.

However, it was not the presidential election which drew main attention to the Belarus-related issues in Fall 2015. On October 8, the Swedish Academy announced its decision to award Belarusian writer Sviatlana Alexievich the Nobel Prize in literature. Thus, she became the first Belarusian woman who won the Nobel Prize and the first winner affiliated with the independent Belarus. At the same time, Belarus is the birthplace of several other Nobel Prize winners, who received this distinction being affiliated with other countries. For instance, this list includes Zhores Alferov and Menachem Begin.

Critical to the current political regime and some social phenomena in Belarus, Alexievich writes her texts in Russian. However, she should be acknowledged for her heart-breaking *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster* [original title: C*hernobylskaya molitva* – BR], unpleasantly truthful *Zinky Boys: Soviet Voices from the Afghanistan War* [original title: *Tsinkovye malchiki* – BR], and other works depicting social dilemmas and challenges that the post-Soviet space and its residents are facing. Non-surprisingly, the members of the Swedish Academia described her texts as "a monument to courage and suffering in our time".

However, the personality of Sviatlana Alexievich and recognition of her talent by the Swedish Academy require somewhat closer look on the reactions of the Belarusian authorities. In its comment issued on October 8, 2015, the Belarusian MFA emphasized that this award will make it into history of the formation of the Belarusian nation, society and state.

On the same day Aliaksandr Lukashenka sent his greetings and expressed his believe that this Nobel Prize will serve the Belarusian state and Belarusian people. On October 24 Lukashenka awarded the Francysk Skaryna Order to Viktor Drobysh, another mediocre Russian musician with Belarusian roots, and during the ceremony accused Alexievich of slandering her own country abroad. This situation shows the dilemma of the Belarusian authorities. On the one hand, they can neither ignore the person of Alexievich, nor international recognition of her talent. On the other hand, her criticism of the regime in Minsk raises its serious concerns, as the opinion of a Nobel Prize winner draws presumably more international attention than the similar opinion of a simply well-known writer.

At the same time, both political and cultural events attracted very little international attention to Belarus. The regime in Minsk seems to remain at its previous positions, strengthening them through re-launching the relations with the West and mobilizing some internal solidarity against potential threat from Russia. Thus this intense fall did not wake up Belarusian people and put them directly to the winter sleep that may last for the next five years.

QUOTES

I belong to the culture that constantly has this degree, this painful temperature. Something that is incomprehensible and unbearable in other cultures is a normal condition for us. We live in it, this is our environment. All the time we live among victims and executioners. In every family, in my family … the year of 1937, Chernobyl, the war. It can tell a lot, everyone has these stories… every family can tell you this novel of pain. And it's is not that I have this point of view or that I like how people think in such situations. No, it is our life… I myself have been wondering who we are, why our suffering cannot be converted into freedom. It is an important question for me. Why does slavish consciousness always prevail? Why do we change our freedom into material benefits? Or to fear, as we did earlier?

Sviatlana Alexievich
October 8, 2015, Nobelprize.org

FEATURES

BELARUS' ECONOMIC SLUMP

DAVID MARPLES

INTRODUCTION

Seven years ago, sitting in the News Café in central Minsk, I overheard a rather loud monologue from a Russian visitor, who seemed quite knowledgable, concerning why the Belarusian economy was certain to collapse within the coming six months. His prediction did not materialize. Four years ago, I heard a similar comment from Washington-based economist Anders Aslund at a round-table discussion in that city. Aslund also put his thoughts in paper in a rather rash article that soon became outdated. He declared in his first sentence that "Belarus is heading to default" and that it was running out of foreign currency reserves.

The prevailing view by 2013 seemed to be that under Aliaksandr Lukashenka, the Belarusian economy had achieved a remarkable stability despite the lack of restructuring and strict government control over the bulk of industry. The country attained steady growth that slowed during the world recession but appeared to have emerged relatively unscathed. That situation has now changed amid another difficult economic period, and Lukashenka's Belarus, ironically has reached an impasse at a time when its relations with the European Union are considerably more cordial, with a suspension of sanctions and travel bans on many government personnel.

Rhetoric about forthcoming economic reform has not been lacking. Kiryl Rudy of the presidential administration was cited by analyst Grigory Ioffe as commenting" "Let them [state-owned enterprises] spend on whatever they want if the result is right. One has to persistently protect property rights, abide by the principle of separation of power, and develop competition." Ioffe maintains that such a statement constitutes the "forerunner of reform". Perhaps. But there is little evidence thus far of the president's commitment to such a course of action.

Indeed, the year 2015, notable for the president's re-election for the fourth time in a highly predictable campaign marked by the lack of opposition candidates, stands out as one in which Belarus' economic fortunes appear at a crossroads. The election was fought largely on questions of stability and independence, particularly in view of the continuing conflict in eastern Ukraine and Russia's demand for a new military base near Babrujsk, but security is not easy to attain without a solid economic base. The events in Ukraine allowed Lukashenka to relegate economic issues to a secondary role: the implicit credo was that any economic suffering was a result of external events over which the government had no control. Unfortunately, however, the problems are mainly homegrown.

ECONOMIC PICTURE

The economic picture looks bleak, and the World Bank's November 2015 report noted that the Belarusian economy was in recession for the first time since 1995 "due to weak external and domestic demand." It also advised that the country needed a significant boost in external financing to meet foreign debt requirements. In fact in 2016, Belarus must spend $4 billion simply to meet the interest payments on its current debts, while seeking further substantial loans. In paticular, according to Economy Minister Uladzimir Zinouski, it is close to finalizing a loan of up to $3 billion over three years with the IMF.

In turn, its gold and foreign exchange reserves amounted to just $4.6 billion on November 1, a slight increase as a result of the selling of government bonds by the Ministry of Finance and National Bank. The World Bank describes the economic outlook outlook as "bleak" and sees the solution in significant restructuring backed by international investors. Nevertheless it predicts a period of stagnation in the coming years.

GDP is expected to fall by around 4% over the 2015 year—it fell by 3.7% between January and September, and reached a record low at -4.4% in the second quarter of 2015. It will be recalled that in the second quarter of 2011, it was at a record high of +11.05%. The economy has come full circle in four years. The decline of the Russian economy has had a negative impact on Belarus, since Russia is its main recipient of exports. Agricultural output has dropped by 3.9%, partly because of adverse weather conditions. The government, needing further loans from the IMF, has been obliged to desist from printing money or raising wages—traditionally an election ploy but absent during the recent presidential elections.

Belarusians generally have borne the brunt of the economic crisis. The average wage has fallen for three

consecutive months as a result of the plunge of the currency against the dollar. In December 2014 the average wage was $621; today it is $409, a drop of 35%. For those in social services, the current wage is even lower at $378 per month. The hardest hit region is Viciebsk voblasć at $323. Over the year, according to an analysis on tut.by (November 24), real incomes have fallen by 5.4%.

Next July, Belarus will introduce the third denomination of its currency since independence with the return rate for one dollar reduced from the current 18,150 BYR to 1.8. Though the government refers to the change as a "technical" one, other officials have maintained that the reform could lead to a rise in prices of around 3%, further exacerbating the country's already high inflation rate of 11.5%--this rate admittedly is much reduced from previous years. Charter 97, one of the chief critics of the Lukashenka regime, reports that over the 23 years of his rule as president, the currency has been devalued by 237 million per cent. In appearance, the new currency looks very much like the Euro, which is perhaps intended to boost consumers' confidence.

POTASH: A STRUGGLING COMMODITY IN 2015

Confusion abounds between various sectors of the government. Belarus does not lack economic reformers or experienced officials, but all attempts at fundamental reforms are halted at the doors of the presidential administration. The president himself appears confused, apparently muddling "refinancing" with "restructuring" on live television. The biggest road block to real reform in Belarus is undoubtedly Lukashenka himself, since it would imply a degree of privatization he would find unsettling and which might undermine his rigid vertical power structure.

The economy has relied for too long on resales of Russian oil products, machine building exports to Russia, and the profitability of Belaruskali, one of the world's leading producers of potash (it ranks fourth behind Canada, Russia, and China). In turn, the government has always been dependent on foreign loans, particularly from Russia, but also from other sources, such as the IMF and China, which is playing an increasingly important role as an economic partner.

Potash is a major source of foreign currency income, but world potash prices have been falling, paritcularly on the crucial Brazilian market where, as Aleksandr Kudrytski notes, they have dropped per ton from $380 to $310 over the past year. Over the year Belaruskali's potash exports have suffered an estimated decline from 9.5 to 9.0 million tons as demand has fallen.

The figure of $310 undermines what was perceived as a potentially ground breaking agreement between Belaruskali and China last March by which the Belarusian company undercut the market with a price of $315 per ton, well below the price desired by its rival Uralkali. At the time, the Belarusian company appeared to have secured the Chinese market. Today, however, that price is above the estimated market value of the commodity.

Both Belaruskali and the leading potash company, the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan (Canada) have been forced to reduce output over the course of the year. Belaruskali suffered a further setback because of repair work, and because of global economic problems, which have promoted farmers to reduce emphasis on fertilizers in order for their farms to remain profitable.

Further, the major importers of potash—China India, and Brazil—have all suffered a drop in currency values that have resulted in a reduction in demand for Belarus' main export. During past crises, the president has threatened to put Belaruskali on the market with a price tag of around $36 billion. That figure seems grossly inflated now. The key commodity of past years is not in crisis—reserves are virtually unlimited and the price is expected to rise again in the near future—but it is no longer the reliable "cash cow" of former years.

A major reason for its current decline in price is the split between Belaruskali and Uralkali that was engineered by Lukahenka himself, when the partnership between the two was dissolved in 2013. The rift, according to one source, "lessened…collective bargaining power" and pitted the two former allies against each other on the world market. Lukashenka claims that the Russian company wished to restore the relationship but he personally refused the offer. A more singular example of presidential interference in the world of business would be hard to find.

THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

A sustained restructuring of the economy would require some harsh decisions and the relinquishment of state control over a number of enterprises. It would necessitate an end to subsidies for struggling government factories, modernization, the development of

more competitive industry, and concessions to foreign investors. But thus far though there is some commitment in Belarus to changes, and even the presidential administration seems willing to make some concessions to the IMF's requirements, there is no indication of a wholesale commitment to economic reform. As noted, that decision under the current administrative structure of the country would need to come from the president's office rather than the National Bank or relevant ministries.

Even in private companies, the government ensures that government controlled trade unions keep a close watch over employees. Lukashenka reportedly informed the management of the successful Velcom company that: "If you misbehave in Belarus, do not take into account our realities, do not work for our people, you will lose your company". The mindset of the government remains very much in the east rather than the west; it supports authoritarian structures even over ostensibly private companies. Yet the EU is Belarus' second trading partner behind Russia, making up 30% of exports and 20% of imports. For better or worse, Belarus is part of the international market, which makes its current failings all the more glaring.

None of this is to suggest that the government is about to face mass strikes or protests, or that the Lukashenka presidency faces any immediate sustained threat from a restless workforce. But the problems within the economy are glaringly obvious with little sign of any willingness on the part of the leader to address them with the sort of fundamental reforms required. The alternative of "muddling along" might have sufficed when Russian largesse allowed the delusion of local successes. It is no longer an adequate resort.

INFORMATION

The implementation of the project to build a nuclear power plant near Astraviec will allow Belarus to substitute over 5 billion m3 of imported natural gas. It is expected to reduce natural gas consumption from 22 billion m3 in 2015 to 16.5 billion m3 in 2020. Natural gas consumption by Belarusian households is expected to stay the same. As from 2019 Belarus will no longer import electricity. The gas emissions are to be reduced by 7-10 million tonnes per annum

November 25, 2015, BelTA

CHERNOBYL AND BELARUS

DAVID H. SWARTZ

Having had the "honor" of exposure to the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant both before and immediately after the April 26, 1986, catastrophic accident there, I am pleased to join others in BR's commemoration of the 30th anniversary of that event. My first encounter with Chernobyl occurred in 1979 when I was serving as head of the advance party of the U.S. Consulate General being established in Kiev, (then-) Ukrainian SSR, on a reciprocal basis with the Soviet Union's opening an additional consulate in the United States.

One day the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry's liaison with our consular group called to say that the ministry wished to invite me, along with the consuls general of the Warsaw Pact countries plus Cuba then operating consulates in Kiev, on an excursion to the Chernobyl power plant. I of course accepted and on the appointed day joined the motorcade of diplomats general led by the Foreign Ministry representative. All of us being total novices in the field of nuclear power, there was little of substance to discuss during the tour, and no doubt all of us accepted without question the assertion of our hosts that the plant was not only safe but would remain so for hundreds of years.

The other side of April 26, 1986, found me stationed in Warsaw, Poland, as minister-counselor at the American Embassy. Inexplicably, the wind direction on that fateful day and ensuing ones was from southeast to northwest. That meant that from Pripyat' on the Ukraine-Belarus border, where the plant was located, the radioactive fallout blanketed Belarus and moved in the direction of Poland and Lithuania. Saturday the 26th was sunny and pleasant in Warsaw. Sunday, however, seemed eerily quiet. It was cloudy and the wind had picked up. The Soviets, of course, blocked any media coverage of the accident as long as they could, which was not long. I first heard of the incident on VOA late that evening. On Monday our embassy, not to mention the Polish government and citizenry, was in a frenzy of activity: trying to get hard facts on the scope and thus potential health dangers from the airborne radioactivity which of course by that time had already arrived in Poland.

Fast forward again, to early 1992. Belarus was again independent. The U.S. recognized Belarus and I was sent to open an embassy, establish relations with the host government, and get to know the country and

its citizens. I had been to Belarus only once before: driving from Germany to Moscow enroute to my first assignment in the Soviet Union.

Washington was not certain about the extent to which, if at all, lingering radioactivity from Chernobyl represented a public health problem in Belarus. The U.S. Army shipped in a large supply of MREs ("meals ready to eat"). The embassy was then still in the Hotel "Belarus," and the MREs were stored in one of the bathrooms, occupying the entire space. These "unique" meals were shared with our newly-recruited staff of Belarusian nationals. Also, we were advised to be careful about buying foodstuffs in the local market, especially mushrooms, leafy vegetables and certain fruits (e.g. strawberries), which apparently are particularly susceptible to radiation absorption. The concern was that some of these could have been grown in southern Belarus on fields bordering exclusion zones in Belarus near the Chernobyl plant.

U.S.-Belarus relations expanded rapidly in 1992, particularly with respect to armaments. The key U.S. goal in 1992 was to achieve Belarus' commitment to withdrawal of its Soviet-era nuclear arsenal back to Russia. At the same time, we strove for Belarus to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as a non-nuclear state. Belarus made and achieved both these commitments, the first of the three newly independent nuclear states of the former USSR (Ukraine and Kazakhstan being the others) thanks to leadership demonstrated by the head of state and the head of government at the time.

We had numerous other goals. In a policy cable I sent to Washington in 1992 I noted—with respect to the Chernobyl issue—that the U.S. needed to continue with ongoing programs (since 1986) of providing needed medical and food aid, supporting market economic reforms particularly in agriculture, and promoting Chernobyl cleanup. The last of these was my personal goal. All kinds of medical assistance had been flowing into Belarus from numerous countries, including the U.S., but little had been done with respect to regenerating radioactivity-damaged agricultural land.

In discussing this problem during one of my consultation visits to Washington, one scientist suggested that we might consider an experiment of growing rapeseed (canola) on several hectares of land near or even in the Chernobyl exclusion zone. He believed that radioactive nuclides would be absorbed into the plant stems, leaving the seeds radiation-free. This idea, if implemented, held out the hope of making real progress in dealing with the economic and, more importantly, morale issues of everyday Belarusian citizens.

Specifically, my hope was that with this experimental project we could achieve vital results. First, polluted land could be returned to profitable use. Secondly, our idea was to convert the canola to bio-fuels and/or industrial lubricants, thus also providing significant economic and ecological benefit.

Unfortunately, an insurmountable obstacle blocked the way: the U.S. Agency for International Development. Most U.S. international assistance projects are funded through this agency. That agency's response to my request for funding to carry out this initial experimental project was swift and negative. USAID prefers to do projects it alone conceives, not those of others including the U.S. ambassador.

So we went ahead on our own, procuring canola seed in the U.S. and growing it on test plots in the shadow of Chernobyl. Begun in late 1992, the canola research project scientifically proved that indeed a valuable, radiation-free crop could be grown on the polluted land. The experiment ended and the project then was ready to proceed to the commercialization stage, unfortunately not with Washington's assent. It has since done so, however--without Washington.

According to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), that organization carried out a joint project with the Belarus government at the latter's request from 1996 to 2001, which again demonstrated commercial value in expedited recovery of degraded Chernobyl land. Subsequently, in 2012 the United Nations Environment Programme produced a report on the environmental, social, and economic impacts of biofuels in Belarus. It concluded, inter alia, that there is the potential for 5.5 thousand hectares of Chernobyl-affected lands to be committed to agricultural use, lands that are suitable for growing biomass and could be converted to biofuel nominally free of radiation and which had lain fallow since 1986.

In sum, the United States clearly demonstrated to Belarus and Belarusians its commitment to assist with immediate and longer-term medical impacts of the Chernobyl disaster. While laudatory, that policy approach largely ignored involvement in economic recovery issues such as job creation and standard of living. From that platform, the U.S. could arguably have made a difference in certain other aspects of Belarusian reality during that period and beyond.

THOUGHTS & OBSERVATIONS

LATE SOVIET CONSTITUTIONAL LAW AND NON-RUSSIAN UNION REPUBLICS: UNEQUAL AMONG EQUALS?

KIRYL KASCIAN

The Soviet Union was a multi-ethnic state which accommodated numerous nationalities within one political formation. Moreover, the administrative division of the country, made according to the principle of ethnicity, was multi-level which *per se* provided various ethnic groups with different opportunities to pursue their own interests aimed at the cultivation and promotion of their own identity and culture. The form of Soviet national policies towards the republics of the USSR was characterized by the formula "national in form, but socialist in content." Post-war developments of the official national policies in the USSR were characterized by the further rapprochement and merger of Soviet peoples and by the creation of a single Soviet culture.

The ethnic composition and territorial division of the USSR predetermined a special role for Russian culture and language as tools for achieving these goals while, at the same time, the maintenance of the official historical canon and available options for each nation within this framework were centralized from Moscow. Thus, because of their different historical experiences and narratives, sometimes clashing with myths and memories of other neighboring nations, the union republics did not have equal opportunities to cultivate their national identities.

There was a number of objective determinants of equality among Union's republics, other than Russia. One of these determinants was history. First, on the one hand, nearly all Soviet territories experienced the process of unification under Russian rule within the Russian Empire. Second, the experiences of their annexations or accessions were different and thus were differently interpreted in the national myths and narratives which were significant driving forces of national movements among the non-Russian nations of the former Russian Empire and soon to-be Soviet Union. Third, the policies of Russian authorities on these lands differed. Fourth, this conglomerate of nations at Russia's borderlands had their own different experiences of statehood in their histories. Fifth, these nations also had different experiences in the establishment of their own national statehood on the remnants of the Russian Empire, and thus their inclusion into the Soviet state varied in circumstance and time. All these determinants significantly affected the official historical canon and thus the scope of opportunities available for the titular nations of the Union republics. For instance, soon after the war, the concept of the so-called "Old Russian people" (*drevnerusskaya narodnost*) was promoted as the official Soviet historical canon, claiming an alleged common ancestry of Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians. This approach therefore subordinated official Belarusian and Ukrainian history to a Russian-centric view, filled with platitudes about the centuries-long struggle of the Belarusians and Ukrainians for "re-unification" with the fraternal Russian people. At the same time, the windows of opportunity among the nations was not equal.

The second determinant was the actual national and demographic policies pursued in the republics and those transposed onto the republics. It was determined by the inter-Soviet migration which was orchestrated by "the ministries, large Soviet industry and defense forces" and ideologically backed as "a mutually advantageous exchange of labour which was boundless, free of conflict and productive."

The third determinant was the presence of the Union republics in the international arena. Though all union republics were proclaimed as sovereign states, only Belarus and Ukraine were founding members of the UN. However, their distinct presence in the United Nations, and hence in international politics, was "purely formal", as "they always follow[ed] the decisions of the Soviet Union's ambassador."

NATIONAL POLICIES À LA SOVIET UNION

Generally, the Central and Eastern European perception of ethnicity sees language as one of the central boundary markers of a nation. Consequently, "[t]here is a widespread assumption that a nation, in order that it can call itself a nation, should have its own language." According to the Soviet concept of nation, language was one of its major determinants of nation, which according to a famous definition by Joseph Stalin, was identified as "a historically formed stable community of language, territory, economics and of a psychical individuality resulting from cultural values."

Moreover, this definition was absorbed by dictionaries of the major Soviet languages.

The Soviet constitutional system "employ[ed] "social engineering through law" and thus developed new meanings within quite standard terminology. With this regard, the 1977 Soviet Constitution was not a timeless legal document, but merely a reflection of the experiences of the Soviet state-building which complied with the situation in the Soviet society of that times.

The first peculiarity of this document was that for the first time in the Soviet constitutionalism it marked a visible shift from class society towards an "all-people State", and contrary to all previous constitutions, it provided that "all power in the USSR belongs to the people."

The second distinctiveness of the Constitution was an introduction of the notion "the Soviet People – the new entity of mankind". On the one hand it reflected the endeavors of the Soviet authorities aimed at "drawing together" (*sblizhenie*) of the Soviet nationalities "through the play of "objective" social forces". On the other hand, this process was compatible with the multinational nature of the state, as "the social and political unity of the Soviet people does not renounce the national differences." The adoption of the new constitutions of the Union republics in 1978 was made according to the model and in compliance with the 1977 USSR Constitution. Nevertheless, it provided the union republics with at least two channels to assess and demonstrate identities of their titular nations.

The first channel was the Soviet Constitution of 1977 and the Constitutions of the Union republics adopted in 1978. The latter documents in addition to the provisions incorporated from the Soviet Constitution, contained elements which referred to the status of titular nations and the distinctive markers of their identity, such as language. Another important peculiarity of the republican constitutions was the evaluation of the previous statehood experiences of the titular nations of the non-Russian Soviet republics, as well as an emphasis on a particular role for Russians in establishing the Soviet power on their territories.

The second channel was the contents of official symbols of the union republics, particularly their anthems. Though being pieces of poetry, the latter were approved by the central authorities and thus provided the titular nations of the republics with a possibility to demonstrate their identities through possible reference to national myths, historical memories, or some key elements of their homeland.

NATIONS AND STATEHOODS IN THE CONSTITUTIONS

There are a number of aspects which should be stressed with regard to the evaluation of the previous statehoods of the titular nations of the Union republics. First, according to all constitutions, the 1917 October revolution was proclaimed as the core event that changed the history of all of the nations in question. Second, in nearly all cases this event was eloquently presented as Russo-centric, i.e. it was the Russian proletariat which overthrew Tsarist rule and assisted the nations in their nation-building. Third, though the Constitutions were proclaimed to preserve the continuity of previous constitutions, both the contextual evaluation and quality of the references to the previous nation-building could significantly differ from those in the previous Constitutions.

The constitutions can be considered according to a number of categories:

1. Constitutions of the Baltic republics which indirectly mentioned the interwar independent statehood of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. This statehood was interpreted as that imposed through the pressure of international imperialism and the nationalist bourgeoisie. At the same time, the events of 1940 are viewed as a restoration of the Soviet power in each republic. There are also some qualitative differences. While in the case of Latvia and Estonia the word "Russian" with regard to the October revolution is mentioned, the Lithuanian version refers only to the "Victory of the Great October". Moreover, in the Estonian case there is no reference to the assistance of the Russian proletariat whilst in the Latvian case, active participation of Latvians in the joint combat for the victory of October revolution and establishment of the Soviet power is mentioned.
2. Constitutions of Azerbaijan, Belarus, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan consider the respective Soviet republics as the first manifestation of historical statehood of these nations. There are only some differences in this regard. The Ukrainian constitution names the Soviet state as that in which the Ukrainian nation (*narod*) was united. Moreover, there is mention of the defeat of the bourgeois-nationalist counterrevolution, whereas the Belarusian constitution has

no references to it. Thus, in the case of Ukraine, their document implies attempts to establish an independent statehood on other than Soviet grounds. In cases of Azerbaijan and Belarus, lack of similar references contrasts with the previous 1937 Constitutions of these republics where "the defeat of the nationalist counterrevolution" was emphasized. Moreover, in the Azeri case, the Soviet nature of this state is emphasized. An Uzbek peculiarity is that Soviet nation-building in Uzbekistan was marked by the direct transition of the Uzbek nation from feudalism to socialism, bypassing the capitalist period. In its turn, the Turkmen Constitution declares that in addition to the statehood, the Turkmen nation has liquidated its centuries-long backwardness.

3. Constitutions of Georgia and Moldova indirectly refer to the alternative statehood projects on the territories in question after the 1917 October revolution. In the case of Moldova, it is stated that the gains of revolution were kept with the help of Russian and other nations of the USSR. This means that Soviet power in Moldova was in competition with another, though unnamed, statehood project and sustained only with assistance from Moscow. Moreover, the Moldovan Constitution emphasizes the foundation of socialist statehood by Moldovans, though without any evaluation of this statehood in the historical perspective. In case of Georgia, a specific date, 25th February 1921, is listed as the date when Soviet power won in Georgia. Like in the Moldovan case, it is emphasized that it became possible with the "brotherly help of Soviet Russia". Thus, the date mentioned in the Constitution implied the collapse of the Democratic Republic of Georgia (DRG), though not directly mentioning this alternative statehood project. Furthermore, the reference to the "help of Soviet Russia" indirectly refers to the military nature of the events which resulted to the collapse of the DRG and Sovietization of Georgia. However, the 1978 Georgian constitution emphasizes voluntary unification of Georgia with other Soviet republics.

4. Constitutions of Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan which contain no references to the previous statehoods.

Thus, none of the constitutions contain references to any pre-Soviet independent historical statehood of the titular nations of the Soviet republics. In some cases, alternative projects of nation-building are mentioned indirectly whereas in most cases they are not mentioned at all, though in some cases such references were present in the 1937 constitutions of the republics in question.

SOVIET ANTHEMS, FLAGS AND COATS-OF--ARMS

The anthems of the Soviet republics are a separate subject of evaluation, as in each case they contain a piece of poetry which *per se* can be interpreted in various ways. At the same time, one can see them all as state symbols. Moreover, the constitutions of each Soviet republic contained an article according to which the anthem of each Soviet republic was a subject of approval by the Presidium of the Supreme Council of a respective Soviet republic. In other words, on the one hand, these pieces of poetry were therefore manifestations of each republic's distinctiveness and, on the other hand, they complied with the general line of Soviet policies.

In these texts it is necessary to address two aspects:

1. reference to the relationship between the titular nation of a republic in question with other nations of the USSR, and
2. references to the geographic objects and other elements of mythology or folklore which are referenced.

Indeed, the only other nation, except for the titular nation of a Soviet republic in question are Russians. In other words, most of the anthems in various ways refer either to Russia or to the Russian people as

1. "brave Russian people" (Azerbaijan),
2. "friend and brother" (Ukraine) or just "brotherly [Russia]" (Belarus),
3. "great Russian people" (Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Uzbekistan) or "great Rus sia" (Moldova),
4. a core or the main pillar of unity in the USSR (Tadjikistan and Turkmenistan).

In case of three other republics, there were no special references to Russia or the Russian people. Hence, Armenian and Georgian anthems emphasized the friendship among "brotherly" Soviet nations, while the Estonian anthem glorified "brotherly Union".

As it was mentioned above, it is quite difficult to evaluate the exact interpretations of these formulations,

as any poetry may be a subject of different interpretations which also may include linguistic peculiarities of a given language. However, these observations show one trend – the central and leading role of Russia and the Russian nation in establishing the development of the Soviet Union, as well as their core role in this formation. In other words, despite this brotherly rhetoric it was therefore practically acknowledged that Russia *de facto* was *primus inter pares*.

Another characteristic element of the anthems is their reference to the "specific homeland", as "a repository of historic memories and associations, the place where 'our' sages, saints, and heroes lived, worked, prayed and fought."[19] This is embodied into mentioning of specific geographic subjects, or elements of mythology. The latter is a typical case of Estonia, where the Estonian nation is portrayed as "Kalev's brave people" which refer to *Kalevipoeg*, the Estonian national epic poem based on national myths and legends. In three other cases – Kyrgyzstan, Latvia and Lithuania – one can trace the reference to the geographic objects. In Kyrgyz case one can trace a linkage between geography and national folklore, as the anthem contains reference to the Ala-Too range, located in the North Tien-Shan, which geographically marks their historical homeland and is also mentioned in the national epic poem called *Manas*. Latvian anthem mentions Riga, the nation's capital. However, the most interesting case is the anthem of Lithuania – which includes three geographic objects of the republic which has Vilnius, the Nioman (Lithuanian: *Nemunas*) and the Baltic Sea. While the Nioman is the longest river that crosses the Lithuanian territory, the reference to the republic's capital Vilnius and to the Baltic Sea seems to echo the nation's history of the 20th century and the peculiarities of Lithuania's territorial formation.

Thus, the anthems could be viewed as the main sources for the demonstration of national distinctiveness. However, the same logic can also be applied towards flags and coats of arms, though such an opportunity for demonstration of national distinctiveness with regard to national symbols proves to be much more limited.

Among all flags of the Union republics, only the Belarusian one can qualify to this category, as it contains Belarusian national ornaments in it. There are also two coats of arms – Armenian and Georgian ones which fit into this framework. Similarly the Belarusian flag, the Georgian coat of arms contained Georgian ornaments. There is a reference to the "ornamental circle" in case of the Kyrgyz coat-of-arms, however it is not specified whether this ornament is attributed to the Kyrgyz nation. As for the Armenian coat-of-arms, it contains symbols of the Greater and Lesser Ararat, two mountains which are located on the territory of today's Turkey and constitute one of main pillars of the Armenian identity. Thus, the uniqueness of the Soviet Armenian coat-of-arms among other Soviet symbols is that it refers to the nation's historical homeland that stretches beyond the actual borders of the Soviet republic.

CONCLUSION

The declared equality of the Soviet republics was in fact undermined by three objective factors: history and its interpretation, national policies, and international factors. Soviet constitutionalism was an example of social engineering through law as it introduced the notion of "the Soviet people" as a reflection of the "drawing together" policies which in turn did not deny national differences and the multinational nature of the state. The 1978 Constitutions of the Union republics provided therefore channels to at least formally demonstrate identities of the titular nations of the republics. The first channel was represented through the reference to the language issues and more importantly to the evaluation of the previous statehood experiences of the titular nations of the non-Russian Soviet republics. Official symbols of the union republics, particularly their anthems, represented the second channel to demonstrate this distinctiveness. These opportunities were used differently and often were somewhat formal markers, especially considering the nature of the Soviet system. Nevertheless, they provided the Union republics with a window of opportunities and the exploitation combined with actual national policies pursued in the republics and towards the republics demonstrated actual inequality among the republics equal on paper.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The full version of this text has appeared as BR Working Paper #5. This working paper is a result of cooperation between Belarusian Review/The_Point Journal and the Center for Belarusian Studies (Winfield, KS). This text was presented at the conference 'National Minorities in the Soviet Bloc after1945' (Vilnius, Lithuania, October 23, 2014). This conference was funded by a grant (No.MOR-039/2014) from the Research Council of Lithuania and organized by the Lithuanian Institute of History, Herder-Institut (Marburg, Germany) and Nordost-Institut (Lüneburg, Germany).

FORUM

ALES KRAUCEVIC: CITY DAYS STRENGTHEN THE TRADITION OF DEMOCRACY



Perhaps every Belarusian urban settlement has its own city or town day. This day is normally linked with a special date in the history of the city or town. The choice of a specific date usually depends not only on the city's/town's history, but also on local authorities. The Belarusian Review has asked well-known Belarusian historian Dr. Ales Kraucevic to comment on authorities' logic in the selection of city/town days in today's Belarus.

Belarusian Review: *Are these urban celebrations important to the city's/town's residents?*

Ales Kraucevic: I believe that the celebration of a city/town day is very important for its residents for a number of reasons. First, it unites urban communities. Second, it educates them through knowledge of local history. Third, it fosters people's honor for their small motherland. Fourth, it strengthens the tradition of democracy – the municipal government.

BR: *Why is the linkage to the events of the last war still very strong and how logical is it?*

AK: The city/town day is organized by the authorities; in the Belarusian cities and towns, they are not elected but appointed by the president. Lukashenka tried to make the events and memory of the Second World War the core of the national ideology. These attempts failed, as this war was the greatest tragedy for the Belarusian people. The nation was not a winner, but a victim of this war.

BR: *How does this logic of celebrating the city day fit into the concept of Independence Day in today's Belarus?*

AK: It is senseless to coincide Independence Day with the entry of the Soviet Army into Belarus in 1944. The liberation of the Belarusian people did not occur then; just one totalitarian regime was replaced by another.

BR: *How important is it for an urban settlement to identify its city/town day with a certain historical event?*

AK: The linkage of the city/town day with certain historical events should be the result of work done by professional historians. For example, such a holiday can be linked with the date the city/town was granted self-rule rights. It is worth mentioning that Belarusian cities/towns started getting their written self-rule rights in the 14th century, while Russian urban settlements were granted these rights only in the 19th century.

BR: *What historical dates could become alternatives for celebrating city/town days?*

AK: One can find a date for every city or town. For example, in the case of Salihorsk, it could be the day of its founding in 1958. For another settlement, it could be the date of the birth of a person of nation-wide prominence, such as Francis Skaryna or Vasil Bykau.

INFORMATION

The Ministry of Communication and Information Technologies of Belarus released the postage stamps from the series "Artists of the Paris school from Belarus". The first-day-of-issue dedication ceremony was held on 29 September. The new stamps include "Ossip Zadkine. The Lake. 1925", "Chaim Soutine. Eva. 1928", "Marc Chagall. Lovers. 1981", "Ossip Lubitch. Landscape with a red roof".

September 30, 2015, BelTA

1939: NEW SOVIET "MASTERS" STARTED ABSORPTION OF ANOTHER INTERNAL COLONY

The Belarusian Oral History Archive project is aimed at collection and preservation of oral testimonies of historical events from eyewitnesses, as well as at the promotion of research and re-assessment of the Soviet period of Belarus' history. The Belarusian Review asked scientific curator of the project Professor Dr. Ales Smalianchuk to introduce the initiative and its main thematic research areas.

Belarusian Review: *You are a scientific curator of the Belarusian Oral History Archive project. What caused the need to create the Archive and what are the main areas of its activity?*

Ales Smalianchuk: The initiative to create an oral history archive was announced by Iryna Kashtalian back in 2010. I supported her because I have long been linked with this research area and see it as a great opportunity for Belarusian society to return to the history which our ancestors really experienced. Oral history often reveals the ideologized falsity of the version of Belarus' history planted by official ideology.

The main areas include the collection and recording of oral testimonies, their processing, i.e. conversion to historical sources, preservation with their possible use by visitors to the Belarusian Oral History Archive website and preparation of scientific papers. In addition, last year we held the first international scientific conference on the events of autumn of 1939. The conference proceedings were published in 2015.

BR: *The unification of the Belarusian lands in September 1939 within the Belarusian SSR is one of the main research areas of the project. Can we speak about certain general trends in Belarusian historiography in the description of these events?*

AS: The Soviet version of "reunification" has long dominated. This interpretation completely ignored the fact that the Belarusian lands were united as a result of a criminal conspiracy between Stalin and Hitler (known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact), which started the Second World War. We all know well what this war became for Belarus... The attempts of individual researchers to show the tragic aspect of these processes (for example, to pay attention to Soviet repression in the Fall of 1939 – Summer of 1941) were usually interpreted as a manifestation of pro-Polish sentiments or even betrayal of either Soviet or "national" interests.

Something has changed now. In Autumn of 2014, 75 years after that "reunification", the silence of official representatives of science and ideology was eloquent. Nobody hindered us in organizing the aforementioned conference in Minsk and trying to look at this process from the perspective of human values, most importantly through the prism of a human life.

BR: *Have any changes in the semantic assessment of the events of 1939 occurred?*

AS: There have been no fundamental changes in the evaluation of these events, although the plurality of views and assessment has greatly expanded. I believe that the activities of the Belarusian Oral History Archive have also contributed to this. For almost three years we have been recording the recollections of residents of the former "Riga border", which divided Belarus from 1921 to 1939. We have also familiarized Belarusian society with the results of our research.

BR: *Can we say that the problem statement and evaluation of the events of September 1939 are different in Belarusian and Polish historiography?*

AS: Indeed, they differ and should in fact contrast. The unification of the Belarusian lands was a positive fact from the standpoint of national history. However, we must always remember that it was accomplished by the enemies of Belarus who pursued only their own goals and strived for world domination. Neither Hitler, nor Stalin cared about the interests of the Belarusian people. Not only Poles, but also Belarusians paid for this "re-unification" with millions of their fellow compatriots' lives. However, there is the univocal assessment of these events by Polish historians. In contrast, Belarusian scholars are aware of the division of the Belarusian lands by the leaders of Poland and Soviet Russia as a result of the Treaty of Riga (1921) and view it as a tragedy. Therefore, it is difficult to achieve such unanimity on this matter.

BR: *What was September 1939 for the residents of Belarus then if we evaluate these events through oral testimonies of their witnesses*

AS: It was a tragedy for those who became direct witnesses to the September 1939 events. Even if it started with solemn greetings of the Red Army and unforced joy that "ours" had come... It became clear very soon that there were no "ours". A ruthless invader had come and the so-called "liberation from the lords" was just a lie and deception. The new Soviet "masters" had started absorption of another internal colony.

ROBERT MICKIEWICZ: POLISH-LITHUANIAN DISPUTE IS USEFUL FOR RUSSIA

Polish culture in the Vilnius (Polish: Wilno, Belarusian: ViĺnIa – BR) *region has a centuries-old history and for a long time it dominated this area. In the post-war Soviet Union, the Vilnius region was the only territory of the USSR where Polish identity could be cultivated legally. "Belarusian Review" discusses Soviet policies toward Lithuanian Poles with Robert Mickiewicz, editor-in-chief of "Kurier Wileński"* (English: "Vilnius/Wilno Courier" – BR), *the oldest continuously published Polish newspaper in Lithuania.*

Belarusian Review: *It is not uncommon to hear that Poles (and also Belarusians) of the Vilnius region are actually polonized Lithuanians, who must "return" to their "true" identity and language. How popular are these stereotypes in today's Lithuania?*

Robert Mickiewicz: This opinion is not popular among Poles or Belarusians themselves. It is rather a product that was created by certain groups of Lithuanian philologists and historians. We Poles (and I know that Belarusians as well), believe that this theory was developed to serve the political needs aimed at fighting Polish (and Belarusian) influences here in the Vilnius region. I believe that this theory is artificial. At the same time, one cannot reject the thesis that the processes of nation-building in our region were quite complicated, because over hundreds of years, several nations have lived here next to each other. Polish culture has been rooted in the Vilnius region for hundreds of years and for a long time it even dominated the area.

BR: *After the Second World War, the region of Vilnius was the only area in the western parts of the USSR where Polishness could be legally cultivated...*

RM: Yes, in the interwar period, Wilno was a very strong center of Polish culture. Immediately after the war, in 1946, and then in the mid 1950s, there were several waves of displacing Polish people from the region. In addition, the war and Stalinist repressions firmly "cleared" elements of Polish life from Vilnius. Nevertheless, Polish influences were very strong here. The small number of intellectuals, who were not repressed or repatriated to Poland, needed their cultural life. Additionally, the Soviet authorities believed that they should not suppress the needs of the Polish ethnic group here in Vilnius. They sanctioned the founding of the Polish language newspaper "Czerwony Sztandar" *(English: "Red Banner", today's "Kurier Wileński" – BR)* in 1953. Moreover, schools with Polish as the language of instruction were re-opened and several Polish folk ensembles and theaters were established. These elements formed Polish life in the Vilnius region. However, these actions were largely the result of the activism of the Polish ethnic group itself.

Under the Soviet occupation, even during Stalin's rule, but especially after Khrushchev's "thaw" people demanded their rights. The most fundamental achievement was that Polish schools were allowed here again and that children could study in their mother tongue. In the beginning of the 1990-s there were nearly one hundred Polish schools in Vilnius and its environs. The Soviets had to adapt to this Polish activism in Vilnius. Moreover, Soviet support of the Polish ethnic group in the Vilnius region was also aimed at countering Lithuanian nationalism. It could be described by the formula: divide and rule. Already in the times of the Tsarist regime, Russia was well aware of the Polish-Lithuanian animosity. During the interwar period it very effectively played this card and continued to do so after the war. The Polish-Lithuanian dispute was very useful for our eastern neighbor. Russia was obviously interested in keeping these tensions as long as possible, so that Poland and Lithuania could not achieve mutual understanding. Here, however, much depends on the extent to which Lithuanian politicians and elites are free from the approaches of a bygone era. A Polish group in Vilnius gave an opportunity for certain pressure, because even the communist authorities of Lithuania were eager to close Polish schools. The actions of Lithuania's communist authorities aimed at the closing of Polish schools were particularly intense at the end of the 1940s – early 1950s. However, the activism of the Polish ethnic group and the intervention of Moscow allowed them to keep the schools.

BR: *What pillars of Polish identity existed in Soviet Lithuania in the absence of any administrative and political autonomy?*

RM: The biggest informal pillar of Polishness was the Roman Catholic Church, especially in those parishes where Polish priests remained from the interwar period. In addition, folk ensembles were also created. Some of them continue to exist today. Another pillar

was the newspaper "Czerwony Sztandar". Probably, the very concept of the newspaper was initially agreed at the appropriate level in advance. The purpose of this newspaper was the Sovietization of the region. The Polish population of Vilnius and its environs still poorly knew the Russian language and largely did not trust the Russian-language communist newspapers. Local Poles were practically not allowed to work with the "Czerwony Sztandar" in the 1950-s. The entire first team of editors was imported from outside the region. They were graduates of the Polish Studies departments of higher education institutions in Leningrad *(today's Saint Petersburg – BR)* in Russia. These people absolutely did not have any family or emotional connections with the region, but they were fluent in the Polish language. But of course, the newspaper gradually had to employ local Poles. Polish studies were opened at the local higher education institutions, first at the Teachers Institute in Naujoji Vilnia *(Polish: Nowa Wilejka, Belarusian: Novaja Viliejka – BR)* and then at the Pedagogical Institute in Vilnius. These graduates of Polish studies joined the ranks of the "Czerwony Sztandar". The newspaper became closer to the Vilnius region and the local people. In many localities Polish schools were created only because of the newspaper's intervention. The status of the "Czerwony Sztandar" in Soviet society was very high because it was the newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Lithuania. When Lithuania strived for independence, an absolute majority of the editorial board sided with the independent Lithuanian state. Zbigniew Balcewicz, the then editor-in-chief, was one of the signatories of the Act of the Re-Establishment of the State of Lithuania. The newspaper dropped its "red robes" and changed its name to the "Kurier Wileński". During the formation of the Lithuanian state, the newspaper and its pro-independence views enjoyed the great confidence of the Polish population of Vilnius and the surrounding region. Thus, despite the attempts of the Soviet authorities to destabilize the situation, conflicts like those in Transnistria, South Ossetia or Abkhazia did not take place here.

KURIER
WILEŃSKI
DZIENNIK POLSKI NA LITWIE

BR: *Polish schools existed in the Vilnius region, while in the western parts of Belarus the last Polish school was closed in 1948. As a result, one ethnic group was split in some way. In your opinion, why did the Soviet authorities pursue such different policies towards Poles in Lithuania and Belarus?*

RM: There are very different theories on this matter. Professor Zdzisław Winnicki argues that it was believed that in Belarus it would be harder to Sovietize its Polish population. It was therefore necessary to somehow encode this group to the mass of people without clear ethnic identity. It would be easier to assimilate them and then create a "pure" Soviet man. There is another version. In contrast to the Vilnius region, Belarus did not have such a quantity of ethnic Polish intellectuals who consciously knew how to fight for their rights, were more energetic and more demanding to have its schools, newspapers and ensembles. Belarus lacked it all. Belarus also does not have such a center of the Polishness, which is Vilnius in Lithuania. For example, Hrodna primarily lacks the historical capacity to perform comparable functions, because even in the interwar era it was quite a provincial town. I must also admit that Poles in Belarus are more dispersed while the Polish community here is very integrated. Political and social activism today is easier because we live in a very compact environment in the capital and its immediate environs. Therefore, it is hard to ignore such a large group living in the capital and around it.

BELARUS ABROAD

BELARUSIANS IN THE UK: LIBRARY AS A SOFT-POWER TOOL

IHAR IVANOU

When the Anglo-Belarusian Society held an event a few months ago commemorating the life and work of Guy Picarda, a former Chair of the Society and promoter of the Belarusian culture in the UK, one of his close friends noted that Guy Picarda re-discovered Belarusian sacral music for people in Belarus. It was not an exaggeration to say: he indeed was the first researcher to take the Belarusian sacral music tradition seriously and approached it as a researcher. Most of his research was conducted at the Francis Skaryna Belarusian Library and Museum in London. Using Belarusians' own heritage, Picarda effectively created a new field of knowledge for Belarusians. Many similar stories going back to the network of Belarusian organisations and institutions in London established after the Second World War can be told. Among those organisations, the Skaryna Library is the best known and respected.



Fr. Alexander Nadson, photo by Michas Skobla

Formally, the Library's history began in 1971 when it was launched in its own building in north London. The real story is much longer. After the Second World War, several Belarusian priests settled in London; they, as well as other immigrants, carried with them whatever they had that was precious: books, hand-woven fabrics, embroidered traditional clothing and icons – memories of the motherland they had to leave. The book collection of Bishop Ceslaus Sipovich, later enriched by the private collections of Fr Leo Haroshka and Fr Alexander Nadson, became the basis of the Belarusian Catholic Mission Library (known as *Bibliotheca Alboruthena*) which eventually, after extensive fundraising among the Belarusian diaspora around the world, acquired independent status as the Francis Skaryna Belarusian Library and Museum.

The 1950-80s was a period of great opportunity for Slavonic and East European studies in Britain: during the Cold War, the British government generously funded research of the Soviet Union and its allies. The Belarusian diaspora, Bishop Ceslaus Sipovich in the first place, made efforts to encourage Belarusian studies, which had been virtually non-existent until then. For that purpose, the Anglo-Belarusian Society was established in 1954 and a peer-reviewed *Journal of Byelorussian Studies* started publication in 1965. As interest in Belarus started taking off in British academic circles, the need for a well-resourced library became clear.

This historic background explains why the Skaryna Library, from its very beginning, was primarily oriented towards the international academic community, not the diaspora in London. In its first forty years of existence, over a thousand researchers, both working for established institutions and carrying personal projects, used the Library. Dozens of books were written there or were substantially informed by materials from the Library. To name few: a ground-breaking series on the history of Belarusian literature by Prof. Arnold McMillin; Vera Rich's translations of Belarusian poetry; Prof. Oleg Latyszonek's work on the development of the Belarusian national identity, "*Od rusinów białych do białorusinów*". Dozens, maybe hundreds of journal articles and conference papers can be added to this list.

The Library operated as a research library and reference centre, not a public library. Its close physical proximity to and symbiotic existence with the Belarusian Catholic Mission meant that Library users could lodge nearby – often for free – during their research visits. This made the Skaryna Library unique and attractive to a vast number of researchers from abroad, incl. Belarus. Already in the 1980s, long before the Iron Curtain fell, the Library hosted such visitors as Adam Maldzis, a prolific Minsk-based writer on the history of Belarusian literature, and Rev Uladzislau Carniauski, a translator of the Bible and Roman Catholic liturgical texts into Belarusian.

Over the years, the Library collection was formed by

various means. Both Bishop Sipovich and Fr Nadson travelled extensively to visit the Belarusian diaspora around the world. As the Library enjoyed a lot of trust from compatriots, they often returned with valuable gifts of books, museum objects, archive materials and donations. An extensive collection of early XX century publications, incl. first editions of the Belarusian classics was amassed, as well as a significant collection of pre-war BSSR and western Belarus (part of Poland in 1919-1939) titles. The collection of post-1945 diaspora publications covering Europe, North America and Australia is arguably the most comprehensive in the world.

Bishop Sipovich, the Library co-founder and main instigator of numerous Belarusian initiatives in Britain, passed away unexpectedly in 1981. The role of Library head was passed to Fr Alexander Nadson who by then had already earned the reputation of a leading scholar in Belarusian Church history. He also made an important contribution to researching the life and work of Francis Skaryna, the first Belarusian printer. Comfortable in the world of academia, he won many friends for the Skaryna Library among scholars.

Then, in the 1980s, collaboration with the library of the Academy of Sciences of Belarus was setup: in exchange for academic journals published in the west, the Skaryna Library received books and magazines from Soviet Belarus for a great variety of topics, like literature, history, law, nature, cinematography, nature and humour – just to name a few. In addition, the Library was purchasing anything Belarus-related in any language that was appearing outside Belarus. As awareness of the Library grew, an increasing number of authors and publishers donated their publications: the Library has hundreds of volumes with authors' inscriptions for the Library and Fr Nadson. The collaboration with the Academy of Sciences ended after Belarus became independent in 1991 due to the high cost of that scheme. Although receiving printed materials without expensive intermediaries became possible, finding publications wasn't always straightforward: the number of publishers exploded, circulation dropped, but reliable and politically impartial distribution channels have never appeared. For many years and until very recently, Prof Adam Maldzis singlehandedly supplied the Library with books and periodicals appearing in Belarus. His extensive contacts secured for the Library both mainstream and very rare publications. The role of „acquisition librarian" adds one more interesting dimension to the life of this fascinating, multifaceted scholar and prominent promoter of Belarusian culture.

It has always been held that the Skaryna Library offered the most comprehensive collection of *belarusistyka* (Belarus-related research) in Western Europe. However, it is impossible to substantiate this very plausible claim: neither printed collection, nor archive, nor museum holdings have been catalogued. The book collection is probably about 20,000 volumes and its best existent account can be seen in Fr Nadson's guide on the Library's website (Nadson 2001). The Library has about 20 pre-1800 books, about 100 maps from 16 cent. onwards, very extensive music and periodicals collections.

The archive is mainly focused on the Belarusian diaspora, but contains materials from the first half of XX century Belarus too; it has only been partially researched or even surveyed, and unexpected discoveries happen there regularly.

Today we can only speculate why such a notable institution as the Skaryna Library has never managed to catalogue its holdings. An obvious fact is that from its beginning the Library operated on a semi-closed access model: the founders and custodians knew the collection intimately and assisted researchers with accessing the best-suited materials. Researchers could browse the shelves freely too. This model worked well as long as the Library's only aim was supporting academic studies and access was only by appointment. After the collection ballooned in the 1980-90s due to the successful collaboration with the Academy of Sciences and the work of Prof Maldzis, retrospective cataloguing became a task impossible for a comparatively small institution as the Skaryna Library.

In 1982 – 2001, together with other Belarusian organisations in Britain, the Library organised and hosted a number of conferences dedicated to outstanding Belarusian personalities, mainly writers, the Greek Catholic Church, and the role of the diaspora in preserving and developing Belarusian culture. Many distinguished scholars delivered talks in the Library and writers read their works.

It would be fair to say that Fr Alexander Nadson determined the character of the Library during its most successful period. His openness to the international academic community, understanding that values of the library world are incompatible with censorship and ideological partiality and impeccable personal reputation among the diaspora are clearly reflected in the Skaryna Library work of his time. Sadly, this also meant that with Fr Nadson's deteriorating health, the Library started declining too. After a long and debilita-

ting illness, Fr Nadson died in April 2015.

If a detailed history of this remarkable Belarusian library is ever to be written, one must not omit the role of Jim Dingley in sustaining the Skaryna Library for almost forty years to date. This British scholar was one of the applicants for the Library's charitable status in 1979; in 1986-2014 he served as Secretary – a crucial role often invisible to outsiders – to the Board of Trustees. A gifted organiser and persuasive communicator, he championed the Library among scholars and various institutions; he brought structured thinking to its activities and advocated for greater openness towards the changing context. It was his initiative to revive the Board of Trustees in 2014 after several years of inactivity.

Today the Skaryna Library is a registered charity which means that in the eyes of British society it is an important cultural institution working for the public benefit. It is governed by a Board of Trustees consisting of representatives of the Belarusian diaspora in the UK and British scholars. Though it is the same Skaryna Library that was founded in 1971, with the same continuously developing collection and in the same building, in many respects it is a new institution nowadays. The reason for that is simple: the world around has changed immensely since 1971. Since the end of the Cold War, funding for academic research in Britain has been diverted to other issues. More often than not scholarly content is now accessed online through free or paid-for sources (the latter are affordable only to universities and a few other well-resourced organisations); this has also completely changed the ways and places scholars conduct their research. Travel to Belarus is easier and cheaper than ever, and the libraries and archives there are generally accessible. This can be continued for quite a while. Therefore, it is no surprise that many people, both in Britain and in Belarus, are puzzled as to why the Skaryna Library still exists - what for and for whom?!! Trustees have received formal and informal requests from Belarus to hand over parts of the collection and the archive to state-funded institutions. There has been speculation about transferring the Library to Vilnius – only a short train trip away from Minsk.

The Trustees see the situation differently: the Belarusian diaspora and Belarus itself need this Library in London. It has saved and preserved thousands of books, documents and artefacts which were destroyed, lost or forgotten in Belarus for a variety of reasons. There is no guarantee such a safe place won't be needed in the future again. The Skaryna Library collected and displayed materials deemed useless or harmful in the BSSR, e.g. anything related to religion. With the Library's assistance, such materials were "re-discovered" in Belarus during Perestroika – just one magazine Spadčyna reprinted dozens of articles from the émigré publications. Nowadays, the Library has a role to play in preserving the marginal, overlooked and embarrassing for the government and social mainstream materials; for example, anything related to the political opposition and various undesired minorities. Not to mention its role in promoting and sustaining interest in Belarus in the English-speaking world…

Therefore, the Trustees are making an effort to open the Library to what used to be unconventional users: Belarusians in London and their children, ordinary Britons – virtually anyone who may enrich their lives through Belarus, Belarusian language and culture. The Library is now open to visitors every Saturday, no appointments required. In collaboration with a well-established online library Bielaruskaja Palička, it has started working on an online repository for digitised books and archival materials. To secure its future and development ambitions, the Library has launched fundraising around the world. It has never received public funds and now it aims to rely on the generosity of Belarusians and their friends too. This will guarantee independence and a strong reputation in the Belarusian community.

London has become one of the centres of soft diplomacy: foreign governments are pumping money into cultural and educational presence in this city. They organise film and food festivals, subsidise exhibitions and language schools. And Belarusians… They created a library.

FURTHER READING:

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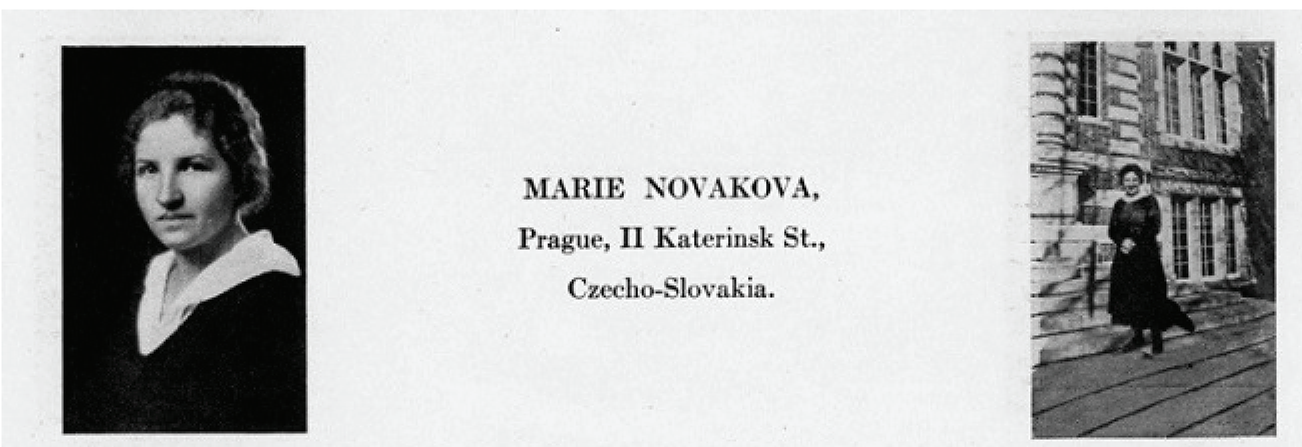
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THE COOKBOOK AS POLITICAL STATEMENT: A NOTE ON TWO BELARUSIAN EXAMPLES

ROBERT A. ROTHSTEIN & HALINA ROTHSTEIN

In 1959 a Vassar College graduate, Mary Stankevich (or Maryia Stankevichykha, using the Belarusian suffix for a wife's name) compiled, edited and published in New York a 31-page stapled typescript in Belarusian called *Vialikalitoŭskaia kukharka*, with the English subtitle *Greatlithuanian (Byelorussian) Cookbook*.[1] This was undoubtedly the first cookbook of its kind in the United States. It was followed in 1972 by a second, expanded edition in English. The book, in either edition, was virtually unknown and only recently was partially reproduced by a Belarusian website.[2]. The compiler, born Marie Nováková in 1900, was a woman of Czech nationality who had spent two years as an exchange student at Vassar, returning to her native Prague after her 1922 graduation to work in public health.



Photographs from the 1922 edition of the Vassar College yearbook Vassarion.
Courtesy of the Catherine Pelton Durrell '25 Archives and Special Collections Library, Vassar College.

Nováková met the prominent Belarusian linguist, historian and political activist Jan (or Janka) Stankevich at a congress of Slavic students that took place in Prague in 1923. Three years later she followed him to Belarus, where they married. She had not been dissuaded by her Czech friends, who warned her that Belarus was a place where wolves howl good night.[3]. She learned her husband's language and became a Belarusian patriot and activist. In 1927, living with her husband in the Belarusian lands of Eastern Poland, she published and edited the first issue of *The Nation (Narod)*, the organ of the Belarusian Peasant Union (*Belaruski Sialianski Saiuz*), which later became the Belarusian Peasant Party (*Belaruskaia Sialianskaia Partyia*).

In the late 1940s the family lived in the American Zone of Occupation of Germany, where she was able to obtain work because of her good knowledge of English. Some of her salary was paid in such goods as American cigarettes and candies. The funds earned by selling these items subsidized the publication of a songbook for schools that her husband published in Germany under the pen-name Brachyslaŭ Skarynich.[4].

In emigration in the United States in the 1960s she briefly chaired the American-Byelorussian Women's Society.[5] The editing and publication of the Belarusian cookbooks was part of the long process that transformed the young Czech alumna of Vassar into a burning patriot and advocate for the Belarusian cause.

In the ever expanding universe of cookbooks in the United States, *Vialikalitoŭskaia kukharka* occupies a special place as the first cookbook and for many years the only cookbook dedicated to Byelorussia, then a Soviet republic, a region unfamiliar to the American public. It shares many characteristics with community cookbooks. The community cookbook is a well-known institution in the United States. Often serving as a fund-raising device, it is usually compiled by a member or a committee of members of a religious or ethnic community and consists of recipes contributed by community members. Her cookbooks however were not merely compilations of favorite recipes, but,



Family photograph taken in the United States in 1949: Janka and Maryia Stankevich and their three sons Viachka (Walter), left rear; Jurka (George), right rear; and Bohush (Bahuslav), front.

as we shall see, served as a means of raising Belarusian national-cultural and political consciousness and shedding light on a region largely unfamiliar to most Americans and even to ethnic Belarusians.

Except for a brief period in 1918-19, it is only since the breakup of the Soviet Union that Belarus has existed as an independent state. In previous centuries the lands of the Belarusians belonged successively to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. In the period between the two World Wars the Belarusian territory was divided between the Polish Republic and the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic. Present-day Lithuania is a small country with an area of 65,200 km^2; the multinational Grand Duchy of Lithuania, on the other hand, at the point of its gre-

atest extent at the end of the fifteenth century had an area of 850,000 km^2 and stretched from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Its full name was the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Rus and Samogitia (*Velikoe Kniazstvo Litovskoe, Ruskoe, Zhomoitskoe*). Rus refers to what is now eastern Belarus plus parts of Ukraine and of Russia. Samogitia (*Žemaitija* in Lithuanian) is in the northwest of present-day Lithuania. The language of the full name of the Grand Duchy is nowadays usually called Old Belarusian, the court or administrative language of the Grand Duchy.

Contemporary historians disagree over the role of Belarusians in the creation of the Grand Duchy: were they the initiators of the state or did they join the state established by the Lithuanians? Contemporary Belarusians, like contemporary Lithuanians, claim the Grand Duchy as their heritage. Some even go so far as to claim the designation "Litvin" as their nationality, rejecting the term "Belorussian" or even "Belarus(i)an" as having been imposed by Tsarist Russian and then Soviet authorities.[6]

In publishing her cookbooks, M. Stankevich wished to achieve two goals. The first, clearly enunciated in the introduction to the 1959 edition, was to create a record of traditional Belarusian dishes that would serve as a guide for the wives of Belarusian-Americans:

> [T]he wives of Americans of Byelorussian descent… in preparation of Byelorussian food, are faced with a problem difficult to solve even with the help of books. They will therefore be delighted to find within these pages recipes by good cooks which will satisfy even those sons who claim that foreign food gives them either heartburn or is tasteless, that only the food which their mother cooked is exactly right.[7]

Some of these wives were of non-Belarusian extraction. Unlike so many contemporary authors whose cookbooks serve recipes with a generous pinch of biographical factoids, Stankievich includes no personal information, and thus a reader unfamiliar with her background would not know that she belonged to the group of non-ethnic Belarusian wives, and that some of her comments were deeply personal. She too seems to have struggled to make *zatsirka* just right[8]:

> A friend of mine wished to make her husband a nice surprise so she baked *bliny*, but she got this response from him: "You know, my dear, next time better make *knedliki* instead of *bliny*." My challenge was *zatsirka*. I tried making it different ways, adding more eggs, another time, with more milk, but it was still not real *zatsirka*. Finally, I asked a friend and made *zatsirka* according to her recipe. Without saying anything [to



Tombstone at Saint Mary of Zyrovicy Cemetery (Mohilnik Parafii Zhyrovickae Bozhae Matsi), East Brunswick, N.J. with Belarusian inscription, "And Christ said, 'I am the resurrection and the life,' John 11:25"

> my husband], I put the *zatsirka* on the table, and he said, "Now this is delicious *zatsirka*."[9]

The other goal was to raise the status of Belarusian cooking traditions and in doing so, to enhance Belarusian national consciousness and pride. Stankevich used a reference to President Hoover's wife to emphasize the importance of traditional cooking. She begins her introduction to the English edition with a quotation from the former First Lady, who had written an introduction to the *Congressional Club Cook Book*. The quotation stresses the importance of native dishes and thereby drives home another of Stankevich's points: that it is natural to cling to past traditions.

> The wife of the former President Hoover writes in the preface to "The Congressional club cook book": "It is astonishing how closely each of the great majority of us keeps to the food and cooking habits of her own line of ancestors."[10]

To make this point, however, Stankevich had to omit the rest of Mrs. Hoover's statement, for the First Lady's argument was quite the opposite – instead of clinging to old ways, she wrote, we should open ourselves to new experiences, include other traditions, and the foods of other peoples.[11] The food of our ancestors, Stankevich argued, is excellent, even superior in all respects to food of other nations:

> This is confirmed at every step by [the experience] of our relatives who emigrated some 40-50 years ago. They cook and love their food. A Byelorussian-American woman said with great conviction that, "Byelorussian food is the best food in the world. It would win a prize if it competed against the food of any other nation."[12]

Stankevich also harnessed the latest research to prove that the diet of Belarusian peasants, who relied heavily on grain and potato products, is wholly rational and beneficial:

> [J]ust recently a Research Laboratory of the Cornell University in Ithaca announced the results of one of its research projects. It turned out that a person can limit himself to good dark bread, potatoes and milk (including dairy products such as sour cream, butter, cheese – M.S.) with a small amount of vitamin C, which our villagers get from sauerkraut.[13]

She urges respect for traditions and continues:

> So let us respect our ancient food, let us cook and say in the words of a married son, who upon visiting his mother said: "Other people's cooking gives me heartburn, makes me nauseous, but your cooking, mama, is just right."[14]

Except for fleeting remarks in her introductions, she did not comment on the recipes, but the choice of dishes and the nomenclature clearly point to her awareness of the complex and rich history of the Belarusian nation and the composition of its society, which included poor peasants and rich elites; Slavs and non-Slavic minorities – all of which left their imprint on Belarusian cooking even after the elites were assimilated into other cultures and their presence was scrubbed from history books by Russian and Soviet historians. The author includes both humble, traditional peasant dishes and culinary creations destined for aristocratic tables. In the Belarusian edition she sometimes explicitly refers to aristocratic recipes, using the term *panski* (from *pan* 'lord, aristocrat') as opposed to *viaskovy* (from *vëska* 'village') for peasant dishes.

There are also interesting departures from traditional Belarusian cooking of the Old Country, starting with the inevitable Americanization of old traditions. The book includes "American" recipes for such dishes as *Smazhanina (Bifsteik)*, *Pechanina (Rostbif)*, which she notes can be cooked without first defrosting the meat, as well as *Tushanina (Patrost)*. Some of the recipes for traditional dishes are adapted for American tastes and ways of cooking or use non-traditional ingredients. For example, there are bananas in a banana cake (*Piroh bananavy*) and powdered milk and canned beets in the recipe for "Cold Red Beets the American Way."

The most striking feature of these books, however, are not the recipes but the comments contained in the introductions to the two volumes and the afterword to the second edition. These are political manifestos that foreshadow many of the themes argued passionately in print, radio, television and on line since the emergence of an independent Belarusian state in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The very titles of the two editions of the cookbook point to the main argument: they create an equation between Belarus and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Recall that the 1959 Belarusian edition has the English subtitle *Great Lithuanian (Byelorussian) Cookbook*, while the 1972 English edition is called *Greatlitvanian (Byelorussian) Cookbook*, with the neologism "Greatlitvanian" replacing the earlier "Great Lithuanian."

Even the orthography of Stankevich's two cookbooks makes a political statement since it follows the principles of what is nowadays called "classical orthography" (*kliasychny pravapis*) rather than those of the "official orthography" (*afitsyinaia arfahrafiia*). The classical orthography is essentially that of the first real codification of Belarusian spelling, proposed by Branisłaŭ Taraškevič and published in his 1918 school grammar. Known as *taraškevica*, it was widely accepted, although not supported by any legislative or executive act. It included rules for spelling Belarusian in both Cyrillic and Latin. The official orthography is based on the 1933 Soviet spelling reform, which mandated the use of the Cyrillic only. The Soviet reform was rejected by many Belarusian intellectuals living in emigration in Poland and elsewhere. They viewed the 1933 reform as an attempt to Russianize the Belarusian language.

The 1959 (Belarusian) edition of Stankevich's cookbook includes an errata sheet that mandates changes to the spelling or morphology of particular words to make them less like their Russian equivalents.[15]. In one amusing change the word for "goose" undergoes a gender mutation from masculine (as in Russian) to feminine. These and other corrections may be due to Stankevich's husband Jan (or Janka) Stankevich, who published over 140 books and articles on the history, ethnography and language of Belarus. He was one of a handful of language historians who wrote about Tatar documents written in Belarusian in Arabic script.[16] He also compiled a 1305-page dictionary that he called *Byelorussian-Russian (Greatlitvan-Russian) Dictionary* or *Belaruska-rasiiski (Vialikalitoŭska-rasiiski) sloŭnik*. It was published in New York in 1989 by the Lew Sapieha Greatlitvan (Byelorussian) Foundation.[17].

In the Afterword to the English edition of her cookbook Stankevich reprises the history of the Belarusian people and situates them in a historical territory that stretched far beyond the borders of the then Soviet Byelorussian Republic.[18]. She describes old Belarusian society as a rich mix of merchants, tradespeople, painters, artisans and scholars. She portrays Belarus as a bridge between north and south, east and west, a bridge between the Christian and Muslim worlds, but states that the place of Belarus is among the Western nations:

> At the end of the 18th century, this state was overrun by the armed forces of Russia, conquered and brought into subjection. Greatlitvania (Byelorussia) belongs to Western civilization. In its origin, history, culture, psychology and ethnographical traits, it is a distinct entity and differs from her neighbors, especially the Russians and the least from the Baltic nations.

In the end she categorically states that the name Byelorussia itself is illegitimate – it was imposed on the nation by the Soviet occupier; the real name, as the title of her book implies, is Greatlitvania.[19] She also expressed the hope that the nation – as a people and as a country – would survive and live on, quoting the first stanza of a patriotic song, a musical setting of a poem by the Belarusian poet Janka Kupala (1882-1942):

The stars will not dim
so long as there is a sky,
our native country will not perish
as long as our people live![20]

There is broad agreement that food and food preparation, along with religion, language, music and dress codes, plays a significant role in defining the national identity of a people. In times of stress and confrontation, the political activities of a group, its language as well as other demonstrations of national affiliation can be suppressed. However, food and customs associated with eating and food preparation survive and often flourish despite repression. Dietary habits – likes and dislikes – form early in a child's development, last a lifetime and are often difficult to overcome. Cooking traditions can sustain the national aspirations of a persecuted group.[21]

Stankevich's modest cookbooks were a strong voice calling for the survival, both political and culinary, of her adopted Belarusian nation. More than three decades separate the publication of her cookbook and the realization of her dream of an independent Belarusian state. But the debates that erupted in post-Soviet Belarus about the nature of national cuisine and its role as a marker of national identity continue unabated.[22]

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[1] M. Stankevichykha, *Vialikalitoŭskaia (Belaruskaia) kukharka*, New York, 1959: n.p., unpaginated. The earlier English designations "Byelorussia" and "Byelorussian" have been replaced in contemporary usage by "Belarus" and "Belarusian" or "Belarusan."

[2] The editors of the website Belaruskaia Palichka (http://knihi.com/none/Grealitvanian_Belarusian_cookbook-en.html) changed the spelling of Byelorussia/Byelorussian to Belarus/Belarusian – an unfortunate anachronism.

[3] V. Stankevich, "Z Ashmianshchyny da Ameryki," *Belaruski svet* 17 (1985): 4-21. This notion of a God-forsaken place, which still prevailed in early twentieth-century Europe, was not far removed from the image of Belarus in earlier times. "Byelorussia is truly a stepchild in the family of Slavic nations," the ethnographer and folklorist Nikolai Andreevich Ianchuk wrote in 1889. "Despite our lack of knowledge about the world outlook of the Byelorussian, his views on religion and family and clan relations, we often attribute to [Byelorussians] the kind of thoughts and beliefs that a real representative of this nation would find complete anathema… When it comes to Byelorussia, it seems that we have not progressed much beyond the time when the Greeks, those bearers of civilization, were convinced that every Byelorussian had to spend some time once a year running through the forest in the form of a wolf" (N. Ianchuk, "Po minskoi gubernii, zametki iz poezdki v 1886 godu," T*rudy etnograficheskogo otdela Obshchestva liubitelei estestvoznaniia, antropologii i etnografii pri Moskovskom universitete. Kn. IX. Sbornik svedenii dlia izucheniia byta krest'ianskogo naseleniia Rossii.* Vyp. 1, 1889, pp.1-2).

[4] *Novy pesen'nik kryvitski (belaruski) dlia shkolaŭ*, Augsburg: D. Sazhnina, 1946.

[5] Alena Tsikhanovich, "Stankevichaŭ hen," RFE/RL Belarusian Service, March 18, 2013 (http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/24932140.html). The information was confirmed by Janka and Maryia's son, Walter (Viachka), personal communication, who spells his family name "Stankievich."

[6] For example, before the 2009 census in Belarus, Ales' Stral'tsoŭ-Karvatski published a 24-page brochure entitled *Becoming a Litvin and Being One*. The author included a copy of the census questionnaire showing how one should answer the question about nationality – by choosing "other" instead of Belarusian, Russian, Pole, Ukrainian – and writing in *litvin* or *litvinka*. A. Stral'tsoŭ-Karvatski, *Stats' Litvinam i byts' im: razvahi da perapisu 2009 h*., Men'sk-Litoŭski 2008: n.p.

[7] First edition and Introduction (dated 1961) to the second edition.

[8] *Zatsirka* is a soup made with barley-sized "grains," which are formed by hand, cutting or grating a coarse mixture of flour, water and egg.

[9] Introduction to the 1959 edition.

[10] *The Congressional Club Cook Book. Favorite National and International Recipes, with a Foreword by Mrs. Herbert C. Hoover and Several Special Articles by Eminent Government Authorities*. Washington, D. C., 1927: Congressional Club. The Belarusian edition likewise opens with a paraphrase of Mrs. Hoover's remarks: "It is surprising how each of us holds on to the food we are used to and the customs connected with food."

[11] "Our cooking, like our governing. is done for the people by the people. It is astonishing how closely each of the great majority of us keeps to the food and cooking habits of her own line of ancestors and how little given to experimenting to see if our neighbors and compatriots near and far have better ways… The housewife everywhere may, through this effort of the Congressional club, have pleasant and helpful contact with this whole cross section of American homes." (http://www.newspapers.com/newspage/54363492).

[12] Introduction to the Belarusian edition.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] For example *s'tsiudzёnym* replaces *studzёnym* for "chilled," *skura* replaces *shkura* for "skin" and *astyhne* replaces *astyne* for "will cool off."

[16] E.g., IA. Stankevich, *Belaruskiia muzul'mane i belaruskaia literatura arabskim pis'mom*, Vil'nia: Drukarniia IA. Levina, 1933.

[17] A two-volume collection of Jan Stankevich's linguistic publications was published in Belarus in 2002: IA. Stankevich, *Zbor tvoraŭ u dvukh tamakh*, Minsk, 2002: Entsyklapedyks.

[18] There is one striking omission in her description: Poland is nowhere mentioned by name, only referred to obliquely as one of the neighbors. And yet Poland is intimately intertwined with the political, cultural and culinary history of Belarus.

[19] This is not quite accurate: The name White Rus sia or White Ruthenia (*Alba Russia*) first appeared in German and Latin medieval literature: the chronicles of Jan of Czarnków mention the imprisonment of Lithuanian grand duke Jagiello and his mother "in a certain castle in White Russia called Polotsk" (*in quo-*

dam castro Albae Russiae, Poloczk dicto) in 1381 (J. Szlachtowski, ed. *Kronika Jana z Czarnkowa (Joannis de Czarnkow. Chronicon Polonorum), Monumenta Poloniae historica*, 2 (1872): 719. A detailed discussion of the name can be found in Nicholas P. Vakar, "The Name 'White Russia'," *American Slavic and East European Review*, 8 (1949): 201-213, and in his book *Belorussia: The Making of a Nation*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956, "Prologue: What's in a Name," pp. 1-4. For many years Jan Stankevich championed the name *Kryviia* for the country and *Kryvich* as the ethnonym, both derived from the name of an East Slavic tribe or union of tribes mentioned in chronicles in the ninth-twelfth centuries. According to Stankevich's son Walter, in 1959 his father was convinced by the Belgian Benedictine scholar Robert van Cauwelaert that these names were unknown to most Europeans, whereas the name "Grand Duchy of Lithuania" was well-known. After his conversation with van Cauwelaert, Stankevich switched to propagating the names *Vialikalits'vin* and *Vialikalitva* (V. Stankevich, "Z Ashmianshchyny da Ameryki," 12-13).

[20] The Belarusian original actually says that "the country that has been taken from us will not perish" (*Ne zahine krai zabrany*). Kupala's text echoes the Polish national anthem, "Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła," written in the eighteenth century, when Poland had been erased from the map of Europe. It begins "Poland has not yet perished while we are alive" (*Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła, póki* [or *kiedy*] *my żyjemy*) and it includes the line, "We shall take back with swords what a foreign power has taken from us" (*Co nam obca przemoc wzięła, szablą odbierzemy*).

[21] "What is striking," write the authors of *The History of Polish Taste*, "is that Polish national cuisine was formed in the nineteenth century, right at a time when Poland was deprived of its sovereignty." Maja i Jan Łozińscy, *Historia polskiego smaku: Kuchnia – Stół – Obyczaje,* Warsaw: PWN, 2012.

[22] The authors are grateful for the assistance of Walter Stankievich; Dean M. Rogers of the Vassar College Libraries; Elizabeth Randolph, editor of the *Vassar Quarterly*, and her editorial assistant Alexa Levine; and for the good advice of Professor Mark Slobin of Wesleyan University. The photographs of Marie Nováková from the 1922 edition of the Vassar College yearbook Vassarion) are used here courtesy of the Catherine Pelton Durrell '25 Archives and Special Collections Library', Vassar College.

SEARCHING FOR BELARUSIANNESS IN THE SOUTHERN PSKOV REGION

MIROSŁAW JANKOWIAK

Over 100 years ago, various linguists and ethnographers defined the borders of the dissemination of the Belarusian nation while studying dialects as well as the spiritual and material culture of the region. For instance, the borders designated by A. Rittich (1875) and Y. Karsky (1903) go well beyond the boundaries of today's Belarus. Belarusians lived on lands that today belong to Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Russia. This also applies to the southern parts of the Pskov region (not in the historical sense, which once formed a part of the Vitebsk province, but that which since 1957 has been a part of the Pskov region).

Statistical data from the 19th and early 20th century leave no illusions about the fact that Belarusians formed the majority of the local population and that these areas were clearly Belarusian in character. For example, in the 1860s, in the district of Nevel, Belarusians comprised 60.8% of all residents, and in the districts of Velizh and Sebezh – 90.2% and 80.9% respectively (for comparison, the percentage of Poles in these three districts was 0.9%, 3.1% and 2.2% respectively). This is also confirmed by dialectological research conducted by Y Karsky, members of the Moscow Dialectological Commission (1914), and P. Buzuk (1926). For instance, Buzuk went to the districts of Nevel and Velizh and unambiguously confirmed the Belarusian nature of the local vernacular. Some local residents also saw their linguistic difference in relation to Russians and Belarusians from the south. In his publications, Buzuk cites testimony of a citizen of the former Velizh district: "they call us Poles (i.e. Belarusians – P.B.) when we go beyond Velikie Luki, and beyond Nevel, they point and laugh at us for the reason that we do not speak Russian".

A change in the scientific approach to linguistic affiliation of local dialects took place after the Second World War. For instance, in 1949, the famous linguist R. Avanesov attributed these lands to the sphere of the Belarusian language. However, in all his subsequent works (for instance, textbooks on Russian dialectology), he refers to these regions as "the western zone of the southern Russian dialect" and the Belarusian-



The map by Y. Karsky (1903):
the dissemination of the Belarusian nation based on people's vernacular is marked by the bold line

-Russian linguistic border becomes... identical to the administrative border of these two Union republics. Unfortunately, this point of view did not spark greater official protests among Belarusian linguists.

More than 100 years have passed from the time when Karsky conducted his research. I decided to investigate how the language situation and people's identity have changed in the southern parts of the Pskov region. The 2002 Russian population census details leave no illusions. There were 711 persons in the district of Nevel who declared Belarusian ethnicity. This figure comprises only 2.26% of the district's entire population. The situation in the district of Sebezh is not much better. I consulted the linguistic material. Analysis of the distribution of linguistic characteristics depicted in the *Dialectological atlas of the Russian language* (1986, 1989) confirmed what every dialectologist or historian would expect. In many places it coincided with the old borders of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Commonwealth of Both Nations (*Rzeczpospolita*) and the former province of Vitebsk. Additionally, a general overview provided by the Pskov regional dictionary demonstrates that after the Second World War the local vernacular retained many Belarusian words (*baćka* (father), *bacian* (stork), *bulba* (potatoes), *viedać* (to know), *jon* (he), *kali* (when), *jaho* (him), etc.). I visited the southern parts of the Pskov region twice during the summers of 2014 and 2015. I investigated the villages located in the regions of Sebezh and Nevel, the two northernmost strongholds of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

My attention was focused on the sociolinguistic situation and the issue of national identity. All my interlocutors firmly declared their Russian ethnic affiliation. Sometimes they spoke about their Polish grandmother or great-grandfather, but none initially identified her/himself as Belarusian. Only deeper drilling of the issue brought some results. A female (born

in 1939) from the northern part of the Sebezh district was asked how people from the Pskov region were called. Her birthplace is a small village called Rzhavki Litovskie and across the river, which once formed the border of the former province of Vitebsk, there is another village Rzhavki Russkie. Her answer emphasized this division: "*they* (i.e. people from across the river – M.J.) *called us* paliaki *(Poles),* litviny *(Litvins), and we called them* skabari*".*

I heard such responses more than once and the



Market in Nevel: the majority of traders arrive from Belarus
Photo by Mirosław Jankowiak

words *paliaki*, *litviny*, *bielarusy* (Belarusians) were often alternatively used as synonyms and as a contrast toward Russia. This shows that the old administrative divisions still function in the mentality of the older generation of the local population today. A search for other traces of Belarusianness did not bring any major results. Unfortunately, this is not surprising because neither in the past, nor today have there been Belarusian schools, organizations or media here. There are also no tombstones with inscriptions in Belarusian, although in some localities (for instance, in Sebezh) one can find those in Polish. Under such conditions Belarusian identity did not have a chance to be maintained. Moreover, it is even difficult to speak about the possibility of its formation in this area in the late 19th - 20th centuries. In Podlasie, the Vilnius region, Latgale or even the Smolensk region the situation was different because in the interwar period these regions had *inter alia* schools with Belarusian as the language of instruction.

Residence within the borders of the Russian state and the dialect vocabulary close to the Russian language resulted in a situation in which the local population calls its vernacular Russian: *I have Russian language, peasant, Russian* [woman, born in 1933, village of Novokhovansk]; *I have Russian, we all have Russian, we are all Russians* [woman, born in 1932, village of Spass-Balazdyn]. I develop the topic further, asking whether their speech is identical to the Russian they hear on television. Only then do some interlocutors acknowledge the "mixed" nature of their dialect: *There can be such accent, one can notice that this is not pure Russian, Russian with Ukrainian, Russian with Jewish; from the Poles* [we] *took many* [words] [woman, born in 1925, village of Opukhliki]. I also ask about the difference between Belarusians and Russians: *they are different at work, a Belarusian is very hardworking, and the language is different, [their] speech is so obscene.* [Potato they call] *buĺba, onion – cybulia, burak* [beet-root], *like, you took in the beet-roots there, time to take in beet-roots* [woman, born in 1925, village of Opukhliki]. However, even in the minds of the people living south of Nevel, those Belarusians reside somewhere much further in the south and are different people, not like the interlocutor her/himself or her/his neighbor. This shows a long-term and intensive process of Russification. As has already happened in my fieldwork, Belarusianness survived in the dialects and they have therefore become a subject of my further study when other research elements failed.

In order to measure the level of Russification of local dialects compared to the studies of Karsky and Buzuk, I visited the localities situated north-east, south-east, north-west and south-west of Sebezh and Nevel. Moreover, Belarusian dialects from the adjacent areas of Belarus and Latvia were an excellent starting point for such comparison. In the past they had formed one dialectal array and today the individuals who speak it reside in three different countries.

With regard to the northern areas of the former province of Vitebsk, it is difficult to speak of a Belarusian dialect. The local speech should rather be considered as Russian with some elements of Belarusian dialects. In the interview of a woman from Rzhavki Litovskie mentioned earlier in this text, the features of Belarusian occured sporadically. For instance, such distinctive markers of this language as a voiced "h" or non-silabic "ŭ" were less frequent than the forms typical for the Russian language. Also, such features as *dziekańnie* and *ciekańnie (i.e. pronunciation of soft d as dź and t as ć – BR)* are no longer as strong and clear as in the territories of Belarus and Latvia. The situation south of Sebezh and south-west of Nevel looks much better and the speech of the local population can be described as a mixed dialect of Belarusian and Russian. Like Karsky and Buzuk decades ago, I noted all the features of the Belarusian language at all structural levels (phonetics, morphology, vocabulary and syntax).

However, they occur in parallel with characteristics of the Russian language. The most Russified level is vocabulary. Therefore, local people believe that they all speak Russian. The interpersonal communication interferes with phonetics to a much lesser degree. That is why this structural level of the language has retained its Belarusian features best. It is therefore through phonetics that linguistics identifies the belonging of vernaculars and dialects to this or that language.

Belarusian dialects were actually the only bastion of Belarusianness in the southern parts of the Pskov region over the last 200 years. However, the question arises as to how long it will survive. Compared to the times of Karsky and Buzuk, the sphere of Belarusian speech has significantly decreased by tens of kilometers. The only support for Belarusianness in these areas are traders from Belarus who in the local markets of Sebezh and Nevel sell Russians *buĺba, cybulia* and *buraki*, and not *kartoshka* (potatoes), *luk* (onions) or *svyokla* (beet-roots).

THE SPACE: BETWEEN SILESIA AND PODLASIE

ANDRZEJ TICHOMIROW

When you're inside the installation *Modry* (English: Deep Blue) by Leon Tarasewicz, you do not fully understand why it is being shown in this place. The new Silesian Museum in Katowice may seem a completely distant and ambiguous place to present this new art object by an Orthodox Belarusian from Podlasie. Upper Silesia is far from the "Belarusian context" (though some historical ties between the region and Belarus can be found) and differs by its clear distinctiveness among other regions of Poland. Anda Rottenberg, art historian and curator of Tarasewicz's exhibition, writes that the artist is a person belonging to "a special minority that keeps its complex identity. From this point of view, his view of Silesia is linked to empathy and comprehension of the problems of this region, which is also multicultural, and, likewise, of his native Podlasie, also separated from the center of Poland". These two regions often do not attract much attention. At the same time, they have clear ethnic, cultural and religious features. These similarities of the two regions allow Leon Tarasewicz not only to apply his art object (developed as a piece of *site-specific art*, first used in the mid-1970s) to the new museum, but also to "express himself" concerning modernity.

Raw wood and color are the main materials used by Tarasewicz. They not only perfectly fit the modern building, but can also be an allegory of work. The ethos of work is very important in the case of Silesia. Its special attitude toward the hard work of miners in the numerous mines created the history of this region and strongly affected the everyday life and self-perception of its residents. Changes in the industry and a gradual shift away from coal mining have significantly changed Upper Silesia in the last 25 years. The new situation has triggered the need for reevaluation of not only economic issues, but also of entire layers of culture and identity.

The new Silesian Museum was opened in the summer of 2015 on the territory of the former coal mine "Katowice". It is located in the center of the city of Katowice and very quickly became an important attraction for locals and tourists. Architects preserved the original space of the object as much as possible and a significant portion of the original buildings were adapted to the museum's needs. Most of the exhibition halls are located underground, small new pavilions reflect light deep into the exhibition rooms and create an unforgettable impression. Old workshops and the sauna will also become museum space during the next year and visitors will be able see even more exhibitions and learn more about Silesia.

In addition to the museum itself, there is also a library and a number of cafes and shops, which have become typical for modern cultural objects. The site itself is a good place for a stroll. A high tower offers a beautiful view of the center of Katowice.

The museum is dominated by the historical exhibition *The Light of History. Upper Silesia over the Ages.* The original idea of the exhibition was very ambiguous. Numerous critics accused its creators of "faking" the past, attempting to symbolically detach Silesia from Poland or even leaning toward contemporary regional autonomists. The exhibition has been redesigned. Visitors can follow the problem of choice that Silesians faced in the tragic circumstances of nationalism and totalitarianism of the 20th century. Particular importance is paid not only to the Middle Ages and the development of the region's characteristics, but especially to the industrialization of the 19th century – from the steam engine to mining and modern metallurgy. Formation of the distinctive regional identity of Silesians took place in the 19th century. The choice between Polishness and Germanness was one of the most difficult and tragic during the first half of the 20th century. The First World War, the three Silesian Uprisings and the division of the region among three countries as a result of plebiscite strengthened ethnic antagonisms and caused the need for an unambiguous choice for the majority of residents. The Second World War in the region also clearly contrasted with other regions of Poland. The concepts of "collaboration", "loyalty" or "resistance" in Silesia were considerably less unequivocal and more multifaceted. I was particularly interested in the part dedicated to the "Solidarity carnival" in the early 1980-s. It shows not only the labor movement and its self-organization, but also changes in Silesian society.

The exhibition is interactive. It accommodates the needs of visitors of all ages and physical abilities. The visitor can also fully experience the region's language peculiarities: information is available not only in Polish, English, and German, but also in the Upper Silesian dialect.



The Silesian Museum in Katowice
Photo by Andrzej Tichomirow

Emotions form an important part of the exhibition. They are very different. Most visitors behave with some restraint, but I often heard fascination, a stream of memories, and even resentment and ambiguous perception of the exhibition's concept and the borderland's past.

In addition to the historical exhibition, one can visit the gallery of Polish art 1800-1945, the gallery of Polish art after 1945 or the gallery of non-professional art. Moreover, different groups of visitors may be interested in the laboratory of theatrical space, which demonstrates various projects of theatrical scenography, costumes and even puppets.

The new museum has become part of a new urban space in the heart of the post-industrial region. In addition to the museum, there is the modern office of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra and the International Conference Center. Through the pedestrian viaduct, you can get into the modern university library, which cannot complain about the number of its readers.

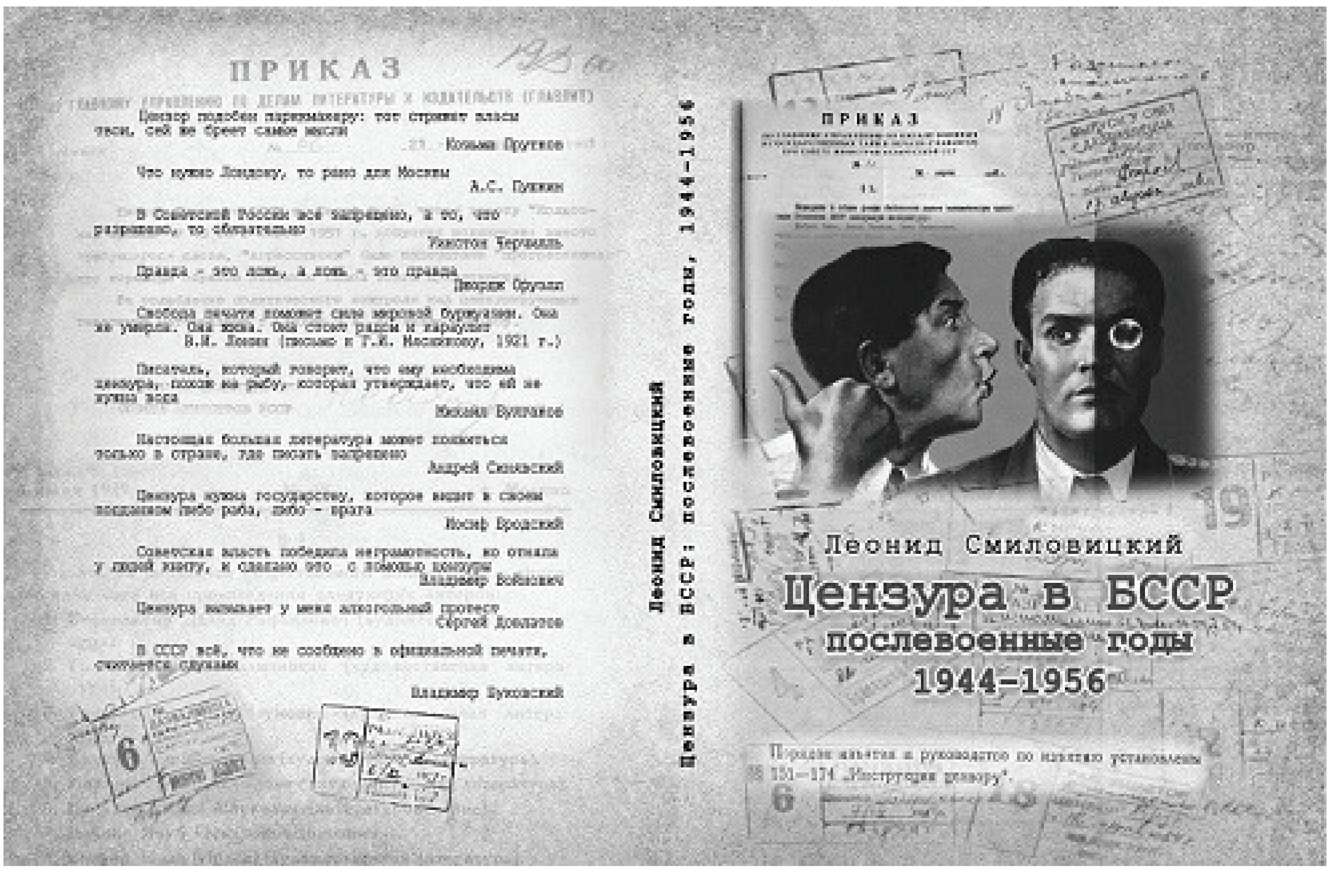
After a walk through the museum, I started not only comparing but also thinking that borderlands have something in common. This brought me to the "Belarusian context". The colors used by Leon Tarasewicz not only emphasize earth, sky, coal or grain. They connect different fates and different lands, emphasizing the complexity of things which cannot always be explained in a familiar way.

NEW BOOKS

CENSORSHIP AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT AND AS A MEANS OF UNDERSTANDING POSTWAR SOVIET BELARUS

ZACHAR ŠYBIEKA

Book Review: *Censorship in postwar Belorussia (1944-1956)* by Leonid Smilovitsky, Jerusalem 2015. ISBN: 978-965-92411-0-1



I read Smilovitsky's book with a great deal of interest, since as a historian I understand the subject and have been a witness, albeit unwilling, to some of the events of that time. My memory etched symbols of Soviet power implanted into society by means of censorship. The Complete Collection of Works by Stalin in the Belarusian language stood on the bookshelf at home. I remember that I liked to look through these beautifully decorated books with ceremonial photographs of a man with a mustache. Only now I understand that apparently each collective farm had these books. After the first post-war consolidation of collective farms, Stalin's works were unnecessary, and they became the property of our family. But by the time I learned to read, they had disappeared. It happened after the death of the leader. Parents decided that this would be a better option. The internal censor prompted a safe solution. There could not be icons on the walls of our family home. Even my pious aunt for prayers took only a small icon which was kept in its box. A color portrait of a young curly-haired man hung in a prominent place in the house. From my mother I learned that this was the famous Russian poet Alexander Pushkin. He was not like our villagers, so I thought all poets were curly-haired. And neither I know then that this portrait could hang in almost every home, because it was printed in a million copies.

I remember a story told by my parents who went to Moscow to visit relatives at the end of June 1953. It was the time when the communist leadership was carrying out the operation to neutralize Lavrentiy Beria. Many streets of the capital were blocked, transport did not operate, police checked pedestrians' documents. Because of this, my father and mother could not visit all their relatives, but expressed their satisfaction that "the enemy of the people" could not seize power.

But let us focus on the book. Every person in Belarus was affected, and continues to be affected, by censor-

ship. Censorship is viewed as some sort of secretive, dark and dangerous force, suspended above everyone who begins to speak out or write. Moreover, many have come to terms with it to such a degree that they accept censorship as an inevitable force of nature. When it rains -- one should open an umbrella.

In reality, censorship is not such an innocent occurrence, especially in the current information era. All limitations on the exchange of information, such as censoring the truth, can only lead to economic, cultural and political degradation, and can lead to impoverishment, soullessness, enmity between nations and military conflicts.

It behooves us from-time-to-time to remind the current generation of the catastrophic results of past censorship, of how it has been implemented. It may possibly expedite better understanding of the damage caused by censorship, and the necessity of its final destruction. The new book by Dr. Smilovitsky about Stalinist censorship in the postwar BSSR appears to be pertinent in the current situation. It is even more important, since Belarus, as well as Russia became the inheritors of Stalinist methods.

The hard cover book in front of me contains colored illustrations, with high quality print, prepared according to all rules of academic publications. Tables, diagrams, explanatory notes on every page, allow the reader to learn of the sources on which the author has based his deductions. The book appendix contains facsimile copies of archival documents and photographs, including some in color; unique lists of forbidden works of literature and art and scientific works, with explanations as to what motivated their prohibition; a biographic index of cultural leaders; a list of periodicals, publishing houses and information agencies; a list of abbreviations; a list of personal and geographic names, and even aphorisms, quotations, statements about censorship. The documents found in the appendix can be considered to be a self-standing treasure trove. They provide the reader with an opportunity to reach his own conclusions regarding the role of censorship in postwar Belarus. The book is written in good Russian and is easy to read, retaining the reader's interest. The contents page and the author's message in English provide the English speaking researcher with necessary guidelines. The book can be considered a model for scientific publication.

The author included in his work all that he could, and all that he possessed – intellectual prowess, a rich store of researcher's knowledge, his soul and heart. The comprehensive work was developed over a period of six years, unhurried and to the author's satisfaction. In Israel such an approach is possible. There, humanities writers can create not only to benefit science, but also for their personal satisfaction. Such a path was taken by Dr. Smilovitsky, and he didn't miss the mark. Already his work has been appreciated and used by a number of researchers. It has been sent to the leading libraries in Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, the US and Western European states. The Estonian Consul in Israel paid the author a special visit in order to get the book and forward it to a researcher in Estonia.

Works published in Israel and elsewhere in English and Russian, as well those published by the Belarusian émigré community, were used by the author. The historiographic analysis performed by the author indicates, firstly, that Belarusian historiography regarding censorship is no less valid than Russian, judging by the level of analysis and the degree of the development of the problem. Secondly, such basic research of censorship in the BSSR in the years 1944-56 by Dr. Smilovitsky is the first of its kind.

The author's conclusions are well documented and supported by references to a variety of sources. Primary among them are archival documents, statistical collections, and recollections by former censors and workers at publishing houses and by journalists, writers and artists, who personally experienced the brunt of censorship's oversight. Dr. Smilovitsky personally recorded the reminiscences of witnesses to those events, including those of his father Lev M. Smilovitsky, who had held high posts in the central bodies of the BSSR. The author visited Belarus yearly in order to collect material for the book. It is therefore not by accident that he uncovered whole layers of related new documents in the Belarusian Archive-Museum of Literature and Art, besides his in-depth utilization of the documents in the National Archive of the Republic of Belarus.

His research was complicated by his residence abroad, while at the same time facilitated in providing greater objectivity in researching the topic. Only by living abroad is the researcher not influenced by the political situation of his former country, allowing him a true reflection on the events of its most recent history.

In the Introduction, the author makes a brief diversion into the history of censorship, mentioning Muscovite Tsar Alexei and the Russian Emperor Peter I (p.15). One can understand the author's logic. He researches the existence of Russian-Soviet censorship on Belarusian lands, and therefore he provides the historical

background, illuminating the origins of Stalinist censorship.

The author begins the main body of the book by showing the operational mechanism by the BSSR main censorship body, known by its acronym – *Haloulit* (Russian variant: *Glavlit*), delving into its most incredible details. Then he interestingly describes the varied activities of the censors, reviews the varied aspects of life of Soviet society affected by censorship, and only then focuses on the topic of censorship of the printed word. Usually that is where most researchers begin their review of censorship oversight. However, the author goes deeper in exposing new directions in censorship, such as blocking access to publications and archival documents, considered to be dangerous for Soviet citizens, by placing them into closed storage. It is at this level that the comprehension of censorship stops, even for some historians who dealt with spetskhran (the storage department for banned literature) and who sometimes were able, under strict control, to acquaint themselves with forbidden literature, without being able to make references to it. The author, however, takes the reader further into the secrets of censorship, by disclosing little known facts of its operation such as the spying on leading cultural and art figures. How such oversight was performed could only be known by those who created it. Thanks to Smilovitsky's research, the curtain of secrets has been widely opened, and can only astonish and cause revulsion on the part of any civilized reader.

Chapter six "Culture and the Arts" is the largest and one of the most interesting in the book. This was due to the extensive use of rich documentation of the Belarusian State Archive-Museum of Literature and Art. Materials found there allowed the author to link censorship with its psychological impact on human consciousness. Addressing the effect of censorship in the field of arts required the author to possess specific knowledge in the sphere of culture.

The final chapter of the book is devoted to the post-Stalinist period of 1953-1956. This design is logical since the postwar Stalinist period ended not with the dictator's death but with the denunciation of his cult. This enabled the author to follow the dynamics in the activities of censorship mechanisms and detect changes linked with the denouncing of Stalin's personality cult. The Israeli historian assesses some post--Stalin concessions as minimal: they did not change the essence of censorship (p.128), as the nature of the Soviet system did not change (p. 134).

Among the successful sections of the book one can mention "Censorship regulation and work criteria" (the author shifts from description of the details towards generalizations), "The enforcement personnel" (an ethnic composition of the censors and their characteristics are provided), "Everyday life" (the author depicts the miserable life of the citizens of the postwar BSSR which is still carefully hushed up by the censored press in contemporary Belarus). One should also pay attention to the section "Exerting control over the second--class and antiquarian book trade" which demonstrates that even Stalin's censorship was not comprehensive. Avid readers managed to exchange publications from hand to hand, through the "black market". To purchase books they also went to the Baltic republics where censorship was weaker. As a result, intellectuals were able to find access to banned publications, while their private libraries were still free from censorship control. Thus, the grounds for the dissident movement also existed in the Belarusian SSR. The book contains interesting facts about the purges of library collections in Western Belarus (p. 136), the post-war captured movies which influenced Soviet cinema (pp. 229-231), the distinctive position of the Belarusian satirical magazine *Vožyk* (Belarusian for hedgehog), which during the infamous Doctors' plot (1953) did not publish a single anti-Semitic caricature, in contrast to its Moscow-based counterpart *Krokodil* (Russian for crocodile) (p. 208).

The author shows the cruelty and absurdity of Stalinist censorship. He reveals the mechanisms of its functioning and investigates it in close connection with Soviet society. Dr. Smilovitsky views it as a mandatory element of the communist dictatorship, without which this dictatorship could not exist. An example of censorship's absurdity was the fact that the weather forecast was attributed to military secrets (p. 116), children's fairy tales were censored and a Haloulit's permission was necessary to print a poster "Buy an ice cream!" (p. 127). According to Dr. Smilovitsky, censorship of science caused particular harm to Soviet society, as it hampered scientific, technological and social progress. The author portrays the evil results of Soviet censorship not only during the post-war period, but also connects it with the fate of the Soviet regime, which started with concealing of epidemics and finished with the Chernobyl disaster.

As an Israeli citizen, the author, of course, could not avoid the issue of censorship in the life of the Jews of the Belarusian SSR. He studies the involvement of Jews in censorship and anti-Jewish censorship. And this adds a greater degree of accuracy and objectivity to the stu-

dy, since the Jewish presence in Belarusian history is still concealed or viewed superficially. The author reveals the paradoxical situation in post-war Belarus in the late 1940s when Jews made up a significant portion of the censors, while anti-Jewish censorship remained as ruthless as that applied towards other ethnic groups of the Belarusian SSR. One can recall a little known fact about the return of not only Belarusian, but also Jewish literature after the condemnation of Stalin's cult (pp. 274-277). This fact became known as the author used the materials of the Central Archives of the KGB.

Language policy in the Belarusian SSR is depicted in connection with censorship. The choice in favor of the Russian language in the BSSR theaters is explained, for example, in economic terms: the pieces in the Belarusian language brought small commercial success whereas government subsidies for their staging were absent (p. 227). This is one of the reasons, although among other reasons for their low popularity, one can mention censorship oversight of Belarusian authors, who neither had conditions for fully exposing their talents, nor for advertising campaigns. In addition, it was influenced by the Russification of the Belarusian population. Under such circumstances, the economic factor had its effect, though it is usually disregarded by Belarusian scholars.

The book contains many interesting facts. The portrait of post-war Soviet society is very broad. At the same time, a lot remained "behind the scenes", as evidenced by the author's interview with an Israeli site (See: "Arrested literature" in: *My zdes* No. 485, 19-26.03.2015). The material collected in the book inevitably leads the reader to understand that after the war in the Soviet Union, during the last years of Stalin's life, there was the strictest censorship and the highest intensity of self-censorship and that censorship was not only to protect state secrets, but to monitor all information flows in the USSR. By the way, Dr. Smilovitsky's scientific style can be characterized by the fact that he does not force the reader to embrace his findings and opinions, especially when they are obvious and follow from the entire logic of the provided facts.

Censorship is an interesting topic, although not easy to study. It provides control over the whole of society, and is therefore intertwined with all manifestations of public life. It is therefore not very easy to detach censorship as a research subject. The principles of selection in the reviewed book are not entirely clear. The lack of a clear definition of the research subject produced some side topics. The author is sometimes interested in describing the problems of Soviet society, which marginalizes the focus on censorship. On the other hand, the "mission" of censorship can only be understood if one knows both the mechanisms of its functioning and the shortcomings of Soviet society, hidden from the people by means of this very censorship. The author has a good reason and very persuasive methodology to show the real state of the Soviet country through the prism of censorship. In the hands of the scholar, censorship acts as a tool of restoration of all the negative aspects of the Soviet system. It creates a real image of not only the censorship authorities, but also of the entire post-war Soviet society. This approach enabled the author to make the important conclusion that post-war difficulties were caused rather not by the outcomes of the war, but, above all, by the very nature of Soviet society. Thus, it perhaps does not make sense to separate censorship as a research subject from the life of Soviet society.

The book is devoted to censorship in the Belarusian SSR. At the same time, significant room is given to the description of censorship in the entire Soviet Union. To what extent is it logical? I believe that the transfer of typical censorship manifestations, discovered by Russian scholars, to the situation in Soviet Belarus is justified, particularly when Belarus-related information is lacking. This eliminates the need to "reinvent the wheel" and at the same time makes the study more comprehensive and panoramic. Moreover, Leonid Smilovitsky was one of the first who realized the impossibility of studying the history of the Belarusian SSR in isolation from the rest of the Soviet Union. Life under communist dictatorship was so universalized that while studying any former Soviet republic or region, scholars had to deal with the restoration of life in the USSR. At the same time, while depicting the all-Union situation, they shed light on life in the Soviet republics.

The book is written in the tradition of Russian-speaking Israeli historiography. It is closely related to modern Russian historiography. However, the author also contributes to Belarusian historiography. His book will be useful primarily to Belarusian readers. Indeed, it will contribute to the destruction of the foundations for idealization of the Soviet regime in Belarus. When Dr. Smilovitsky goes beyond traditional Jewish studies and focuses on the issues important for all of Belarus, it can be exemplified as the author's respect for the homeland and a tribute to its people. The example of Leonid Smilovitsky demonstrates that the Belarus-born people are ready to help their country of origin from abroad. However, this cooperation requires creation of favorable conditions.

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- Tichomirow, Andrzej. 'Polish National Minority in Belarus as a Research Problem', B*elarusian Review Working Paper* #1 (October 2014).
- Kascian, Kiryl. 'Belarus-EU Relations: Ad Hoc Actions vs. Pre-developed Strategy', *Belarusian Review Working Paper* #2 (November 2014).
- Kascian, Kiryl. 'Definition of a national minority à la Belarus: dynamism or droop?', *Belarusian Review Working Paper* #3 (January 2015).
- Kascian, Kiryl. 'The romanization of Belarusian: an unnecessary dualism', *Belarusian Review Working Paper* #4 (une 2015).
- Kascian, Kiryl. 'Late Soviet Constitutional Law and Non-Russian Union Republics: Unequal Among Equals?' *Belarusian Review Working Paper* #5 (November 2015).

BR Working Paper #4 and #5 were prepared in cooperation with the Center for Belarusian Studies (Winfield, KS).

All BR Working Papers can be downloaded from our website:

http://thepointjournal.com/output/index.php?pg=files&fp_id=8&spr_change=eng

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